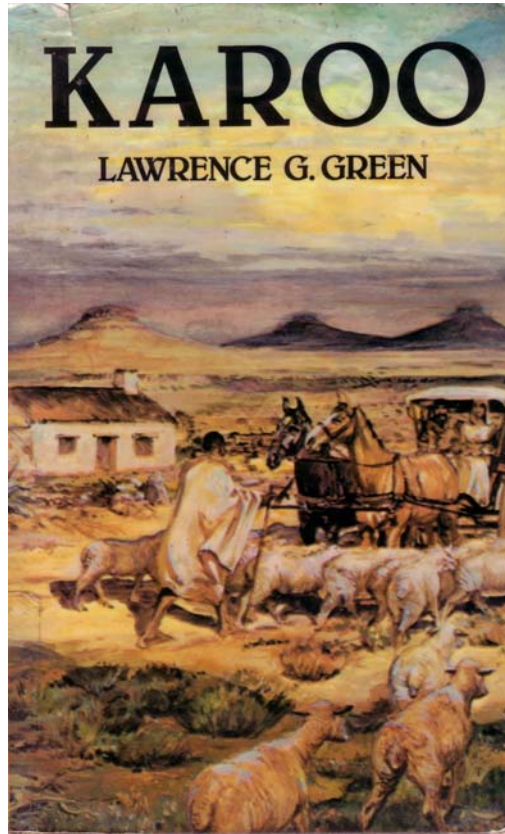


KAROO

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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CHAPTER 1 GREAT KAROO

*Years and years I've trekked across it,
Ridden back and fore,
Till the silence and the glamour
Ruled me to the core;
No man ever knew it better,
None could love it more.*

-Perceval Gibbon.

IT must have been a drought year when the first Hottentot tribes migrating southwards gazed on the Great Karoo for the first time. They named these plains Garob, meaning dry, unfruitful, uninhabited. Pioneer white farmers corrupted and used the Hottentot name, so that in documents of two centuries ago you will first discover the words Carro and Karoo.

In the karoo you may find children of five who have never seen rain. Yet this killing climate also holds great healing power. A karoo farmer, you will remember, invited a dying King of England to rest his stricken lungs in that buoyant air.

Many have gone to the karoo under the cold sentence of death and returned to live beyond the three score years and ten.

Karoo is a wide term covering more than a hundred thousand square miles in its widest meaning. Within that area are the strangest possible contrasts ... the huge daisies called *gousblomme* making a wonderland of the veld for miles outside Beaufort West ... away to the west in the Calvinia district many farms are deserted and the sheep farmers are searching Namaqualand for grazing.

There are, in fact, many karoos in South Africa, and they form the most spacious plateau region in the world outside Asia. Nearest to the coast is the Little Karoo, no desert nowadays but rich, narrow, irrigated valleys shut in by wild mountains, the Swartberg and the Outeniquas. Climb over the Swartberg by the most sensational pass in South Africa and you come to the desolate expanses of the Great Karoo. I suppose the Great Karoo proper, bordered by mountains with six and seven thousand foot

peaks - the Cedarberg, Swartberg, the Roggeveld and Nuweveld - has an area of no more than roughly thirty thousand square miles, perhaps five times the size of the Little Karoo. Yet it is hard to say where the Great Karoo ends. It merges into the high northern plains of the Cape, and much of the Orange Free State is spoken of as karoo. It sweeps across relentlessly to the northwest, to Sutherland and the Roggeveld and Hantam; and beyond, even in Namaqualand, you are still in true karoo sheep country.

There are karoos within the Great Karoo - Ceres Karoo, Tanqua Karoo, Bokkeveld Karoo, Roggeveld Karoo, the Mordenaar's Karoo north of Matjesfontein and the Gouph Karoo (sometimes the most barren of all karoos) under the Nuweveld range.

Often the only visible boundary in the Great Karoo is the horizon. "I am like an eagle," an old farmer told me. "I look all round and see no one, not even the smoke of a neighbour's chimney. That is why I love the Great Karoo."

The first journey of my life was a Great Karoo railway journey. Summer, with canvas water-bags swinging from every doorhandle, each daylight hour an ordeal. No dining-car in those days. When I smell methylated spirits I always remember those early journeys between Cape Town and Kimberley, with my mother boiling water for tea in the hot compartment. But the first journey I cannot remember, for that was in 1900 and I was seven weeks old.

Some people argue that 1900 was the last year of the nineteenth century, but I regard myself as an unwilling child of the twentieth, the century of atomic uncertainty - live for the day and reconcile yourself to suspense and inflation and flying saucers as best you can. The nineteenth century would have suited my temperament better. I have a high regard for the pace of the ox and I think wistfully of the great hush which reigned before the coming of petrol engines.

Nevertheless, it was a motor-car that first gave me the feel of the Great Karoo. I had seen it only as many thousands see it, from the windows of

the trains. But I had grown up before the peculiar spell of this vast, silent wilderness gripped all my senses at once; before I realized the beauty locked in those brown spaces. Someone had distilled a motor fuel from prickly pears and floated a company which aimed at transforming a curse of the veld into a cool million or so for the shareholders. The directors planned a journey from Cape Town to Bulawayo to show South Africa that the new fuel would really give a performance almost equal to petrol at much lower cost. I was selected as the trustworthy, independent observer who would be able to swear afterwards that nothing but prickly pear spirit had gone into the tank. (With all expenses paid, this sort of light but skilful work suits me admirably). So there came a happy day not long after World War I when a 1916 Overland car turned northwards on the hazardous trek after being cheered out of Cape Town by the shareholders.

I am the only survivor of that journey. Our driver, a famous racing motorist of his day,

sucked the poisonous prickly pear fluid into his lungs by mistake at a demonstration in Rhodesia, and it killed him. There was an old prospector, a gambler all his life, who had put his savings into the enterprise in a final effort to amass wealth. He died a poor man. The only other passenger was a hungry-looking financier who drew up his last glowing report many years ago.

In such company, with the old prospector pointing out sights would have missed, I became aware that the Karoo contained far more than the "miles and miles of blow-all" of the legendary British soldier's description. Sign posts were rare in the Karoo more than thirty years ago. We had to call at farm after farm, especially at night, to ask the way.

"*Mense!*" someone would shout in excitement as the car rumbled up. "People!" The women remained silently in the background, peering over the kitchen half-door, while the farmer recounted every detail of the landscape he

"Every *spruit* is flowing, everyone knows that the great transformation is at hand."
(Chapter One.)



knew so well. I can visualise many a hospitable *voorkamer* adorned with Biblical texts and portraits either of Oom Paul or Queen Victoria.

Farmers were proud of their independence in those days. They were a long way from dorp or rail, and so you found a forge and anvil and carpenter's shop in every farmyard. Some made their own gates, more or less skilfully, and I dragged scores of them to and fro on that journey. They shod their own horses, built the stone kraals and dams, sank wells and mended pumps.

Those were the days when one's host was sincerely interested in visitors and his questions were more searching than a modern immigration form. Married or single? Purpose of journey? I could see each karoo patriarch summing us up, not with contempt but certainly without envy. And as we departed the farmer would always call after us, reassuringly: "*Vat die groot pad.*"

"Take the main road." It sounded easy, but the main road across the Great Karoo was no more than a wagon-track. Cape cart and wagon drivers whipped their teams off the road to make way for us. Sometimes they failed to hear our feeble motor-horn, and then our driver blew a police whistle. Motor-cars seldom come in sight. The approach of another car far from a village was a noteworthy event, and usually we stopped like pioneers in a wilderness to exchange news of our adventures.

Wide roads turned away deceptively from the *groot Pad* and led us to farm-houses secreted behind flat-topped koppies and guarded by famished, leaping hounds. Unexpected twists in the road brought us suddenly into dry river-beds where heavy sand held the high-pressure tyres. But it was an intimate journey, never so monotonous as the modern rush along the tarred national roads. You could never sleep at the wheel in the old days. The romantic old road twisted past every kraal and dam. Sometimes, even in the karoo, there was a

shady tree and an *uitdraaiplek* where the radiator could be refilled in comfort.

In the villages knowing *stoepsitters* left their benches to gather round the car and jeer at our "Cape to Bulawayo" banner. "You'll never get there," they assured us, and secretly I felt they might be right.

I remember the old-fashioned karoo stores where one shook hands all round on entering and then endured the routine cross-examination. There were cries of wonder, and often of disbelief, when we stated that our motor-fuel was a prickly-pear extract. I had plenty of time to study the goods in those stores; everything from sheep shears to coffins.

Most of the wayside hotels were of the type in which gin bottles served as water carafes, rooms were cheerless and the only impressive piece of furniture was the enormous richly carved diningroom sideboard. Some of those hotels remain unchanged to-day. Others serve as annexes, crouching behind modern

buildings. I can never drive past them without seeing a vision of that battered Overland car with the extra tanks of prickly pear juice strapped to the running-boards.

Before leaving each village there would be long discussions in hotel bars, maps spread on the counter, while our learned advisers argued among themselves over the best route. Once we went in despair to a police station, only to find that their latest road map bore a last-century date.

Ours was no royal progress. No day passed without punctures and minor repairs, and there were several breakdowns on a grand scale. Thus I could wander off into the solitude of the karoo, returning hours later to find the experts still bending over the tortured metal of the engine. I could walk away among the *driedoring* bushes, the *brosdoring* and *klapperbos*; or saunter along a river bed where the *taaibos* and mimosas grew; or climb a koppie in search of hardy ferns on the southern slopes. Always there was the red earth between

the bushes; always the meerkats worshipped the sun beside their holes; always the sun heated the rusty-looking ironstone, the typical karoo *ysterklip* of the koppies. The old prospector struck this rock with a hammer one day, just to show me, and it rang like a bell.

One abandoned farmhouse lingers in my memory. The upper storey was in ruins and the remaining windows were shuttered. It must have been a fine place once; but now it was a scene of mystery and decay. Under a huge weeping-willow tree stood a broken-down wagon. I thought of the ghost legends of the karoo, and I was pleased that we did not have to spend the night there. A solitary coloured man was living in a pondok close by, and I asked him the name of the place. "Moordenaar's Bosch", he replied.

I saw no ghosts on that journey, but I came to love the karoo plains and the distant mountains, blue in the morning, pink and purple and gold at sunset. For mile after mile the great expanse was peppered with ant-heaps and small round bushes like the tufts of wool on a Hottentot's head.

Bumping along in that old car, under the sun blaze or in the white moonlight, I lost count of the days and longed to explore every corner of this wilderness.

God helps those who help themselves, of course, and the wish was granted. I went out into the karoo on the queer missions that make up a reporter's life, searched for lost airmen, described the agonies of drought and flood, sat through murder trials and investigated miraculous tales of mineral wealth.

Drought in the karoo forms a picture that never fades. All through the centuries you come upon these black pages in the karoo story, the recurring and inevitable dramas of drought. When drought ruled the karoo last century there were famines in which many coloured people died. Some survived by eating snakes and dogs and grinding the bones of animals that had perished. Prickly pears became a luxury. Farmers lived on biltong and brak water, and their bywoners ate dead donkeys. Cabbages fetched six shillings apiece instead of a few pence. Often the northern villages

were isolated because it was impossible for wagons to move across country without grazing for the trek-oxen. Bread could not be baked in the villages and prices rose so high that civil servants could not come out on their salaries. Gaols were crowded with prisoners convicted of stock-theft, their crimes provoked by hunger. Even nagmaal could not be held on the day appointed. People crossed the Orange River on foot when the river ceased flowing. During one great drought in the middle of last century it was said that one-third of the wealth of the Cape Colony had been destroyed.

Most stupendous of all drought spectacles were the springbok migrations. I *cannot* say that it was drought alone which impelled them to move, for naturalists have never solved the riddle. One day the people in karoo farmhouses and villages, people sleeping in wagons on the veld would awake to a sound like the wind before a thunderstorm. Dust clouds on the horizon marked the swift advance of the springbok. Then came the thunder of the hooves, the bleating and

whistling and snorting of the horde. Soon the whole landscape was an ocean of millions of buck. A brown and white ocean. Waves of light brown backs, dark brown stripes, white bellies, long white hairs on the rumps raised like fans. A flood of living flesh, hungry and thirsty flesh.

Drought in our own time may be less sensational, but many scenes remain unchanged. Sheep still die by the thousand, breeders killing the lambs to save the ewes. Baboons prey on the sheep and dig for roots to save their lives when there are no sheep. Burning winds sweep up the dust spirals. High trees and orchards wither in the villages. Thirsty springbok and other wild creatures lose their fear of man and stand among the sheep licking the last moisture in muddy dams. Farmers go out with rifles and shoot the dying cattle to end their sufferings. Colonies of meerkats trek by instinct to moister places. Animals tortured by thirst stumble pitifully to the homesteads in their vain search for relief. Ostriches tap on window-panes, and the lowing of the cattle is an appeal that wrings the heart.

Mimosa and *kameeldoring* trees, and even the tough *brostdoringbos* are shrivelling.

Day after day for weeks the temperature on the stoep remains over the hundred mark. Boreholes and windmills, dams and irrigation schemes and cheap railway rates for fodder lessen the misery and prevent famines. But a long drought, searing the karoo from end to end, is still a feast for the vultures. And a lizard crawling out of a broken ant-heap may be the only living thing to be seen for miles. Cloud masses roll up magnificently before weary eyes that have been deceived too often to go on hoping. The billowing clouds drift away again, and there is the merciless sun. Under the heat the whole karoo lies exhausted, and only the cicadas are singing in the river-bed.

Yet there must come a time when the promise so often withdrawn is fulfilled at last. Each day brings the oppressive thunder weather, with everyone staring at the sky, or at the blue-headed lizard, the *bloukopkoggelmander*, that is supposed to gaze steadfastly into the north when rain is on the way.

Then a hot wind stirs the vine leaves over the stoep. Horses kick up their heels and snort as they sense the changing weather. The wind rises and the sky darkens. How large the raindrops seem as you take deep breaths of the smell of wet earth.

Perhaps the rain comes at night, announced by a gigantic blue whiplash of lightning that arouses every sleeper, followed by a thunderclap that puts further sleep out of the question. Next moment the rain torrents are finding every forgotten crevice in the roof. Drought is merciless, but the breaking of the drought is ferocious.

Smell the karoo after the drought has broken, and that typical aroma will remain in your memory as long as you live. Moist veld has its own scent; it may vary from district to district, for it is compounded of soil and plant life. Take a deep breath of the karoo when the rain is still dripping from the trees. If you are breathing it again after thirty, forty years you will renew your youth.

When you look out in the morning after heavy rain the karoo is a glittering sea with small islands of bushes. No doubt the telephone wires are down and many dams have been washed away. On the main railway line, perhaps, the water is cascading across the track, tearing up the sleepers, and passenger trains are waiting in the stations. But every spruit is flowing, everyone knows that the great transformation is at hand. Grass will soon cover the sunbleached skeletons and grow as high as the fences. Revived bushes will wave in the breeze. Such rains are worth millions of pounds, for the karoo becomes a land of plenty.

Rain can be dangerous on the karoo, but hail is the menace farmers really fear. At times the hail lies three feet thick. Roofs are pierced by hailstones with the force of bullets. I remember three thousand sheep, herded in pens at a karoo railway station, being killed by hail as swiftly as though machine-guns had been turned on them. Even tortoises are found dead on the veld after a severe hailstorm.

Millions of years ago the shallow basin of the Great Karoo was a vast glacier which became a lake when the ice melted. Then the pent-up waters burst through the escarpment and these karoo rivers tore out the tremendous gorges of the Swartberg and other ranges; the gorges which we call poorts, where the precipices rise sheer above the traveller for three thousand, four thousand feet. Sometimes, as in Meiring's Poort, the mountain peaks are six thousand feet above the stream.

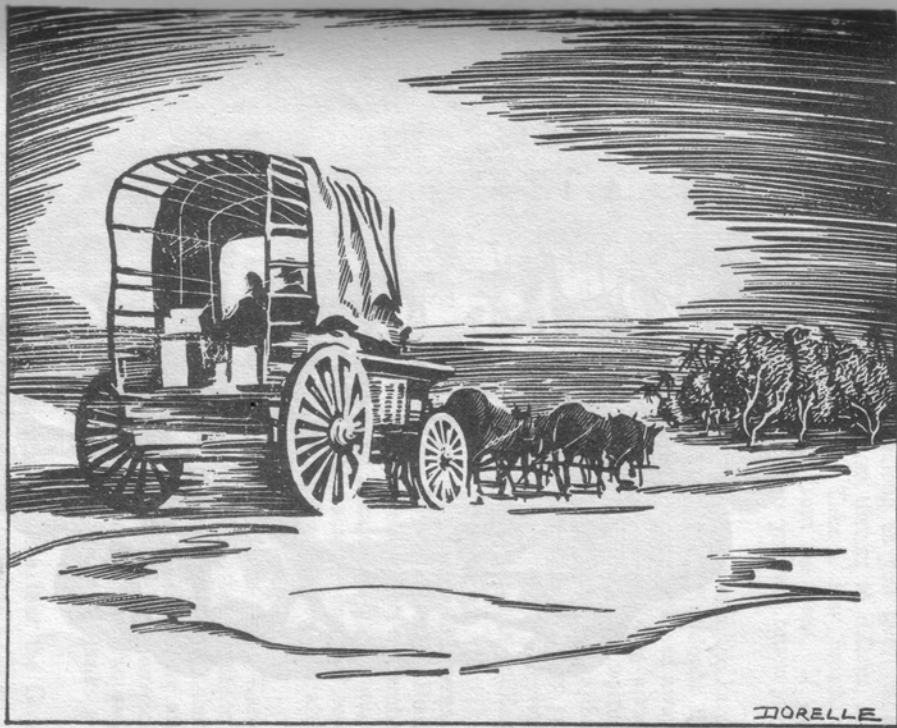
Some of the world's leading scientists believe that the Great karoo saw the birth of the first mammal. Here, too, millions of years later, the ape may have developed into primitive man. The famous karoo strata, undisturbed since the swamps dried up, have revealed marvellous specimens of extinct life, and the greatest discoveries may still lie ahead.

Who discovered the Great Karoo? The ape-like men left no records, and so the Bushmen are the first human beings we can recognise in those great spaces. When you come to the white

explorers there is still a mystery which is unlikely to be solved. I have dealt in a previous work¹ with the "lone grey company before the pioneers"; and in the Cape of the late seventeenth century there were many such adventurers. They were *vryburgers*, cattle farmers living-along the mountain ranges that shut off the Boland from the unknown hinterland. The governors at the Castle forbade them to wander beyond the limits of the colony; and they were liable to a year's imprisonment and confiscation of their cattle if they broke the law. Yet the call of the interior was too strong. They trekked off secretly over the mountains, risking the-freedom they loved, risking their lives, to see what lay beyond the barrier. These unknown explorers carried tobacco and beads, and they returned with cattle bartered from the Hottentots. Wisely they kept their secrets.

¹ "Lords of the Last Frontier" (published by Howard Timmins)

So the Great Karoo and the Little Karoo have an official discoverer, while those who went before him are no more than a legend. The explorer who first described the journey over the unmapped mountains was Ensign Isaac Schrijver of Leiden. I have a kindly feeling towards this hard-bitten old soldier, for he gave his name to a beautiful and secluded corner of Saldanha Bay, still known as Schrijver's Hoek. He was a reliable man, according to documents in the Cape Archives, and he had explored Namaqualand as a sergeant. It is also on record that he was entrusted by the Company with the salvaging of the wreck of a Portuguese ship, the *Nostra Signora de los Milagros*, beyond Cape Agulhas. Others had hidden valuable oddments from the wreck and been punished for it; but honest Schrijver handed over all the diamonds and jewels, porcelain and cinnamon, white linen, exquisite little chests; all the saucers of gold and flasks containing musk which he found in the shattered hull of the Nossa Signora. Another



"If his own pastures failed he could wander away over the horizon with his family, his wagon and his stock. Thus the karoo *trekboer* was born." (Chapter One.)

mission which Schrijver carried out successfully was a search for runaway slaves who were being harboured by the Hottentots in the Sandveld to the north of Piketberg. Clearly he was not only a fearless adventurer, but also something of a diplomat.

Schrijver's adventurous karoo journey arose out of visits paid to the Castle by messengers from the powerful chief of the Inqua Hottentots. These messengers said that their chief had heard of the white men at the Cape and was anxious to meet them. His country was rich in cattle, but no white man had ever been there.

Simon van der Stel selected Isaac Schrijver for this mission, and gave him twenty-one armed Europeans, some Hottentots, and two wagons loaded with strong drink, tobacco and red beads. Thus, thirty-seven years after Van Riebeeck's arrival, the first recorded expedition crossed the Outeniqua mountains through the elephant path called Attaquas Kloof into the Little Karoo. So far they were still following the trail of unknown and illicit white hunters of

earlier years; but when Schrijver's party located the Inqua chief near the present site of the town of Aberdeen, they had reached country hitherto unseen by civilised men. On the way there Schrijver noted "a plain level as far as the eye could see." Dr. E.E. Mossop, the historian, who traced Schrijver's tracks, has shown that this must have been the portion of the Great Karoo to the east of Blydeberg.

Schrijver finally crossed the end of the Swartberg range, and spent several days bartering with the Inqua chief near a dramatic mountain which he called "Vervallen Casteel" (ruined castle). Then, driving five hundred cattle and a flock of sheep before them, Schrijver and his men set off on the return journey. The whole expedition lasted three months, and the redoubtable Schrijver rounded off his report with the words: "To God be thanks for His Grace that we have come hale and hearty through so many perils."

Always at the Cape settlement there was the urgent demand for meat. Early in the

eighteenth century the Company decided to allow the frontier farmers to move farther inland and set up cattle posts. Bold spirits spread out in search of grazing, leading incredibly lonely lives, enduring severe hardships, but finding in the karoo the freedom they had sought.

One of the most imaginative Afrikaners I know, a man filled with the tradition and folklore of the race, gave me this summing up of the early karoo settlers. "They were the restless spirits, the hardiest of a tough people," he declared. "Men who had grown up with an appreciation of the easy and pleasant living naturally preferred to remain in the fine white homesteads of the old Cape districts, under the oaks that framed the wide vineyards. They lived graciously, with fires roaring up their chimneys in winter, their silver ornaments glowing in soft candle-light. Only a really strong character could make up his mind to leave the villages and the settled countryside for the dry and distant grazing areas beyond

the mountains. In extreme isolation such men became even stronger. They lived under wagon-tents with their families, and evolved as a distinct type which has not died out to this day."

It is clear from the writings of old travellers that many of the frontier farmers suffered great hardships. They were cut off by the mountains from Cape Town, their only market. No passes had been built, and it was impossible to cross the mountains with loaded wagons. Pack-oxen were used, wagons were taken to pieces and re-assembled. The trek to the Cape was such a formidable undertaking that the most distant farmers went to town once in two, three or four years.

Isolation bred resourcefulness. Some journeyed as far as the Cedarberg to cut timber for wagons and homes. They tanned the skins of buck, sheep and smaller animals to make their own *velskoene* and clothes; moleskin jackets and heavy leather trousers. Once or twice a year, perhaps, a smous might reach

them with essentials they could not secure in any other way - bags of gunpowder, coffee beans which they roasted and crushed between stones. Bullets they moulded themselves, and they did not hesitate to melt down their precious tin cooking utensils when the supply of lead ran out.

In a land without doctors they had to rely on nursing by their wives, on salt and brandy, aloes and herbs and balsams. Weaklings did not survive in the karoo, and those who grew up in that germ-free atmosphere were among the healthiest people on earth.

A grazing licence cost five pounds a year. But there was nothing to keep a man in the confinement of the six thousand acres allowed on payment of that fee. If his own pasture failed he could wander away over the horizon with his family, his wagon and his stock. Thus the karoo *trekboer* was born.

One hazard the first karoo farmers were spared. In the beginning there were no hostile

natives, though the long war with the Bushmen was to follow later expansion. The small Hottentot clans were encountered as the pioneers advanced; but the Hottentots, never a strong or warlike race, welcomed the newcomers and were glad to serve as cattle watchers in exchange for brandy and tobacco.

It is doubtful whether there were ever more than forty thousand Hottentots, all told, in the Cape districts. Early in the eighteenth century came the first great smallpox epidemic, which spread from a Dutch ship, killed a quarter of the white people in Cape Town, and almost wiped out the Hottentot tribes. Far inland, the white settlers realised that solitude protected them from the scourge, and the death-roll on the karoo was negligible. But the Hottentots thought they had been bewitched. They made no effort to avoid the mysterious contagion, and simply awaited death in their kraals.

So the Hottentots survived in the hinterland only as scattered remnants. All through the karoo story you meet the Hottentot shepherd, a

faithful servant in the face of every peril of weather or wild beast. His descendants, no longer of pure Hottentot blood, are still the wise men of the veld, great hunters of jackals and other vermin, often the trusted advisers of their masters. But the Hottentot race vanished long ago from the plains where the Dutch explorers found the old chiefs and gave brandy for long-horned oxen.

Live close to nature in some remote corner and you may escape the plagues that ravage mankind. In the karoo mountains there dwelt a race even more primitive than the Hottentots; those elusive little people, the Bushmen. The smallpox left them untouched, just as the deadly Spanish influenza epidemic of our own time passed them by. Uneasily they watched the white farmers entering their age-old karoo hunting grounds. A clash was inevitable; yet for most of the eighteenth century the vast game herds sufficed for white man and Bushman, and seldom did the Bushmen attack the newcomers. When war was declared at last, it was the most ruthless war ever fought on South African soil. Perhaps it would

have been better for the Bushmen if they had perished like the Hottentots in the first wave of smallpox.

CHAPTER 2

PASSING OF THE KAROO BUSHMEN

VAN RIEBEECK heard tales of little wild folk called Sonqua soon after landing, but several years passed before white men set eyes on this strange race.² Then, and for centuries afterwards, there were some who doubted whether the Bushmen were human beings. The early Dutch settlers nicknamed them "Boschmanneker", the name given to the orang-outan of the Dutch East Indies.

It is clear from the narratives of the explorers that the Bushmen lived in the mountains of the interior, and seldom ventured near the coast.

² It was in 1655 that the Dutch official Wintervogel came upon a party of Bushmen near a point on the Berg River still known as Sonqua's Drift. This was the first recorded contact.

One of the first reports described them as "an entirely wild nation without houses or cattle, but well-armed with assegai, arrow and bow." Skirmishes between explorers and Bushmen occurred in Van Riebeeck's time; and not long afterwards three Dutch burghers who were shooting hippo in the Berg River were murdered by Bushmen. Nevertheless, the Bushmen were not regarded as a serious menace during the first century of Dutch colonization.

All this time the Bushmen remained undisturbed in their great caves on the heights. According to their folklore, as the Bushman clans moved down from the north into the plains of the Great karoo, they found only the millions of antelope and other wild beasts. For a long time the Bushmen believed they were the only people on earth.

George William Stow the geologist, true pioneer in Bushman research, spent forty years copying the rock paintings and gathering details of the cave artists. He proved the great

antiquity of the Bushman race in South Africa and pointed to their stone implements and other relics as "their unquestionable title deeds".

During their golden age the Bushman clans lived in peace with one another, their only enemies the beasts of prey. You will never find a battle scene in the very old Bushman paintings; only such happy events as dancing and hunting. In their caves they were secure. A small rock shelter sufficed for a family, but powerful Bushman chiefs selected huge caves which became the traditional homes of their clans for centuries. Such caves were richly adorned with paintings and tribal emblems, and the Bushmen gave these caves vivid names - the Cave of the Python, the Red Serpent, the Black Serpent, the Elephant, the Ostrich.

To these lairs they carried their springbok and much other meat in triumph. Here they roasted their *uintjie* bulbs, crushed and dried them. They pounded grass seeds, too, and stored them with powdered locusts for hungry winter days. Here

they feasted on the roasted white ants called "Bushman rice". Here in the season they brought the heavy combs dripping with wild honey and made the secret mixture with roots that transformed it into strong beer. Under these huge stone roofs, at the new moon or the full moon, they danced the Mo'koma, the "dance of blood", men and women leaping in circles until they were covered in blood from their noses.

When the first thunderstorm of the season approached, the Bushmen tore up their skin karosses. They knew that summer was on the way, that they would soon have all the warmth they needed; and they beat their drums and danced again: But they feared the lightning. Sometimes the great rocks jutting out over their caves were struck by lightning, for these rugged projections drew the flashes more easily than the smooth cliff-faces. Occasionally the rocks fell, and these were catastrophes indeed. Whole clans of Bushmen were crushed or entombed by the fallen rock.

Lions never troubled the Bushmen, even when they were far from their caves. They carried a secret powder which they sprinkled on their camp fires at night; and the lions found the aroma so nauseous that they kept their distance: Stow was told that this powder was composed of the spores of a peculiar fungoid plant growing only on anthills.

The Bushmen had many other old secrets and peculiarities. Their eyesight was the keenest on earth, and this was proved in a sensational manner late last century by Dr. W.H.I. Bleek, the linguist. When he had mastered the Bushman language, Dr. Bleek took a detailed note of the Bushman legend of the "Dawn's Heart" and the "Dawn's Heart Child". This showed clearly that the Bushmen had been observing the movements of the planet Jupiter and its satellites with the naked eye long before civilised astronomers had made the discoveries which are now common knowledge. Their legend was so old that the Bushmen must have been aware of Jupiter's

sateliites even before Galileo saw them with his primitive telescope.

Never did the Bushmen cultivate a single plant, but their knowledge of herbs as medicines and poisons was a rich legacy, the accumulated wealth of their ancestors living century after century as children of nature.

News in the Bushman country travelled quickly and accurately, and this still occurs in the remote territories where the Bushmen linger. Some investigators have fallen back on the theory of telepathy. It is far more likely that the news is carried by the Bushman's clever, traditional smoke signals - thin columns of smoke from damp grass, so faint that the smoke is usually seen only by Bushman eyes. Yet they never progressed beyond the Stone Age: Many white hunters have seen Bushmen striking off long flakes of stone to open and dress a springbok.

Some of the great caves of the Bushmen dominated mountain passes into the Great Karoo and Little Karoo. At first the Bushmen watched

the white men entering their old hunting grounds without protest. For decade after decade through the eighteenth century the movement went on with only occasional Bushman raids and murders; nothing so widespread as to stop the advance of the white settlers or provoke a war.

So the cattle farmers trekked first into the land where Ceres now stands, and called it the Warm Bokkeveld because there were so many springbok. Beyond lay the much higher and larger area which they named the Cold Bokkeveld. To-day you find vineyards and wheat, fruit and vegetables in these old districts; and the oaks planted by the pioneers as far back as the seventeentwenties.

They went beyond the Bokkeveld region to the Roggeveld where the wild rye grows. Before the middle of the eighteenth century they were settling in the Calvinia district, then known only by the Hottentot name Hantam. Ten years later the valleys between the Langeberg and Swartberg ranges had been settled and the boldest spirits had gone on to the Nuweveld

(now Beaufort West) and the Camdeboo, the "green heights" of the Hottentots between the present towns of Graaff-Reinet and Aberdeen. Meanwhile others had ventured up into Namaqualand as far as the Kamiesberg. By the seventeen-sixties there were white farmers along the Sneeuwberg range. Both the Great Karoo and Little Karoo had come within the rim of civilization, though it was an insecure foothold indeed which the white trekkers had secured.

After all this time it is still possible to trace the incidents that led to war. George Thompson, the Cape Town merchant who described his travels early last century so accurately, investigated this point. He found an old Bushman who had lived all his life, on the frontier, and remembered the peaceful years when the farmers were seldom troubled by raiders.

Then, in the seventeen-seventies, a farmer named Coetzee van Reenen sent a white overseer to look after his flocks along the Zak River. The overseer was a brutal man who acted at all times as a tyrant and shot Bushmen for no reason at all.

At last the Bushmen retaliated by killing the overseer with an assegai.

This act of revenge was regarded in the Cape as murder. A strong commando was sent up to the frontier and many innocent Bushmen were massacred. As soon as the commando departed the Bushmen rose across the whole Great Karoo, from the Kamiesberg to the Stormberg. Farms were ravaged, farmers and their families were murdered. After that (went on the old Bushman) more commandos rode against the Bushmen and the guerrilla war was fought along the frontier year after year.

Bushman prisoners were sometimes taken all the way to Cape Town. A band of fifty-eight Bushmen of all ages and both sexes were tried in 1772 for the murder of the burgher Hendrik Teutman and his wife and daughter on the Roggeveld border. Some were flogged, others were hanged or broken on the wheel.

Thunberg the botanist was travelling in the Roggeveld two years later when he met a

commando which had killed a hundred Bushmen; and they told him of another detachment which had wiped out four hundred Bushmen in the Sneeu-berg. The government supplied powder and shot and handcuffs for these expeditions: Thunberg noted that members of the commando had been wounded by arrows, but no one had died.

A surgeon who accompanied a commando into the Bushman country reported that the farmers used gunpowder and urine as antidotes when poisoned by arrows, and many recovered. Those who suffered from such wounds asserted, however, that they were subject to occasional attacks of insanity, brought on by peculiar weather conditions. A significant phrase appeared in this surgeon's report: "The Bushmen have no fear of death."

Apart from the danger, life on commando against the Bushmen meant weeks or months of hardship. The burghers were often hampered by horse-sickness and lack of ammunition. They suffered from hunger and thirst; especially thirst,

for the Bushmen poisoned many springs and it was always difficult to decide whether the water was safe. And always there was the thought that they might return to find their homes in ashes, their cattle stolen, their wives and children murdered.

So powerful were the Bushmen late in the eighteenth century that they almost exterminated the Hottentot remnants and nearly succeeded in driving out the white settlers. Farmers in the distant Sneeu-berg appealed to Cape Town for help. "Many thousands of Bushmen have united their inward anger and rapacity, and now oppress and injure us as they have never done before," ran the appeal. "We fear for our lives and are too weak to form commandos. Some of us are already flying to save our lives and what little we have left."

Pioneers had reached the Sneeu-berg region to the north of the present Graaff-Reinet in the seventeen-seventies, and there were so many Bushmen in the mountains that they named the country the "Boesmanstreek". Great herds of

wildebeest, springbok and zebra roamed the plains. The grazing was so fine that not only sheep but cattle could be kept there. It was a paradise compared with other stretches of the karoo, but for the hostility of the Bushmen. After a few years the farmers had to trek away again. For more than a decade the Bushmen successfully barred the way to this rich area.

Three large commandos of burghers, half-breeds and Hottentots took the field against the Bushmen and scoured the northern border for hundreds of miles. Five hundred Bushmen who refused to surrender were shot, and prisoners were apprenticed to farmers for a term of years. But the wild Bushmen were fighting for their lives, knowing that the white invaders would rob them of their hunting grounds. Right up to the end of the eighteenth century the war went in favour of the Bushmen. When Governor van Plettenburg led his famous expedition in 1778 there was not a white farmer left on the Sneeuweberg plains.

Hordes of Bushmen attacked the wagons of the Cape meat contractor north of Swellendam in the seventeen-nineties. They killed one white man and captured eleven thousand sheep and two hundred oxen. A commando from Swellendam overtook them and three hundred Bushmen were shot.

Towards the end of the century some farmers on the northern border started a conciliation movement. Governor Macartney told the people of Graaff-Reinet : "To free you from the rapacity of the savage Bosjesmen will, I fear, for some time require vigorous measures." He urged the farmers to show mercy except when defending their families and flocks. Macartney added: "The Bosjesmans are to be left in possession of their just rights and habitations, and are not to be molested, nor their children taken from them or made slaves or servants of, on any pretence whatsoever."

So the farmers shot zebras for the Bushmen (their favourite meat)and even distributed cattle in the hope of making peace with their wild

enemies. The missionaries Kicherer and Edwards set up a school for Bushmen on the Zak River, but they were often in danger and declared: "Treachery is inspired by a desire to revenge the cruel wrongs suffered from the white men's hand." This was an eighteenth-century "Mau Mau campaign" in the karoo, and it is difficult to see how either the Bushmen, with their savage instincts, or the colonists acting in self-defence, could have behaved differently. The policy during the last years of the Dutch East India Company was to exterminate the Bushmen, and between 1786 and 1795 the Bushman casualties were at least two thousand five hundred killed and more than six hundred captured. Not many adult male Bushmen were taken alive. They fought to, the last arrow.

Lichtenstein, the observant German doctor who travelled widely in the hinterland, summed up in favour of the colonists. "The Bosjemen did not originally inhabit the countries whence they now carry on their most injurious warfare," he declared. "It cannot

therefore be urged that the savages are but revenging themselves for being dispossessed of their own country. At the time when the Europeans settled in the Roggeveld, in the Snow Mountains, in Agter-Bruintjeshoogte and other parts there were no Bushmen there. It was the wealth of the colonists which first attracted them thither, from their own proper district on the banks of the Great River."

This was not an entirely accurate statement, though it was no doubt true of certain parts of the frontier. It appears that Lichtenstein was anxious to counteract the impression spread by the English traveller Sir John Barrow, who had been through the country about five years previously and had denounced the farmers.

"The name of Bosjeman is held in horror and detestation, and a farmer thinks he cannot proclaim a more meritorious action than the murder of one of these people," Barrow asserted. "A boer from Graaff-Reinet, being asked in the secretary's office if the savages were numerous and troublesome on the road,

replied he had shot only four, with as much composure and indifference as if he had been speaking of four partridges. I have myself heard one of the humane colonists boast of having destroyed with his own hands near three hundred of these wretches."

Yet the critical Barrow realized that the white people of the frontier lived in a state of perpetual danger. He noted that a farmer could not walk five hundred yards from his homestead without a musket, and added: "To bear a life of such constant dread and anxiety, a man must be accustomed to it from his infancy, or unacquainted with one that is better." In some places he found vineyards, peach-trees, almonds, apples and pear-trees loaded with fruit, on deserted farms.

Lichtenstein mentioned the bravery of the wife of Veld Commandant Gerotz. While her husband was away, Bushmen drove off a number of sheep. She pursued them on horseback accompanied only by a Hottentot, fought them and put them to flight.

According to Lichtenstein, there was little trouble with the Bushmen in areas where game was plentiful. When he was travelling with General Janssens, some of the farmers on the northern border lit signal fires and brought a party of friendly Bushmen to the camp. They were given meat and dismissed.

Here and there the conciliation movement showed good results. Major Collins, a British official sent round the country by Governor Caledon, reported: "Several inhabitants of the north-eastern districts appear to have exerted themselves with as much zeal to acquire the friendship of the Bosjemen as they had before done to blot them from the Creation." Collins was referring to the Sneeu Berg area, where the farmers had no serious trouble with the Bushmen after the opening of the nineteenth century. Elsewhere the policy often broke down in times of drought. The hungry Bushmen were unable to resist the temptation of raiding cattle.

Always the Bushmen observed the law of the wild. If a Bushman deserted his wife she

murdered the children. When a mother died, the babies were buried with her. Twins were killed at birth. Bushmen threw their children to the lions to save their own lives. Old people were put in thorn-bush kraals to die of hunger when the clan moved on. Moffat the missionary declared: "Bushman will kill their children without remorse if they are illshaped, in want of food, or where the father has forsaken the mother; and bury them alive rather than allow them to fall into the hands of enemies."

Moffat also explained why the conciliation policy showed little success until the Bushmen had dwindled in numbers to the point where they were no longer able to resist successfully. "Past sufferings and past offences on both sides had produced a feeling of hatred so universal that it was of no avail to pacify one party while in other directions, upon the smallest provocation, their compatriots were being shot down like wild beasts without pity, and men, women and children frequently indiscriminately slaughtered,

thus arousing in the breasts of thousands a thirst for revenge and plunder."

Yet there were always farmers who had doubts about the wisdom of the war against the Bushmen. Veld Commandant Gert van der Walt, who settled in the present Colesberg district, reported to the government in 1825 that he had been fighting the Bushmen from the time he could use a gun, but he could not see that this vindictive retaliation had done any good. For several years he had tried to live in peace with the Bushmen and Landdrost Stockenström had encouraged this attitude. Van der Walt said that he supplied the Bushmen with goats and other food, and in dry seasons the Bushmen looked after his flocks.

Away in the west at the same period, George Thompson (the Cape Town traveller and merchant I have already mentioned) rode into the Roggeveld and heard of other efforts to arrange a truce with the Bushmen. Thompson said that the remote country he saw on this journey was visited only by a few vagabond smugglers and

missionaries, and claimed that his description was the first to be written. He hired horses to ride from farm to farm, and found the settlers "a frank and hospitable, but uncultivated set of men, kind to the traveller, but constantly embroiled in civil disputes with each other and in a barbarous warfare of reciprocal aggression with the miserable Bushmen."

He stayed with Veld Cornet Nel in the Roggeveld, and was entertained by a Bushman woman playing the ramkie, an instrument with half a calabash at one end and strings like a violin producing a dull, monotonous thrumming. Nel told Thompson that he had accompanied thirty commandos against the Bushmen in thirty years. On one occasion two hundred Bushmen had been massacred and their children had been carried back into the colony. Bushman atrocities called for vengeance. However, the district had become fairly peaceful as the result of a pact Nel had made with the Bushman leader. Every third full moon a band of Bushmen called at his farm and told him what they had been doing since the

last visit. If the report was satisfactory he gave them sheep, goats, trinkets and tobacco.

"Truly these frontier boors have no very enviable life of it," Thompson commented. "A Bushman kills five hundred sheep in a day." Thomson could not find a Hottentot willing to accompany him as a servant into Bushmanland. He called at many homesteads which were built like clay forts with loop-holes. Yet there were men willing to face all the risks of isolation. Far up in the Kamiesberg, in a lonely spot, Thompson met an Englishman named Martin, a man of seventy who had lived in the wilderness for so many years that he had almost forgotten his own language.

Farmers informed Thompson that Bushmen, when taken young enough, made useful servants. Those who had grown up in the wilds seldom remained on the farms. "They prefer sloth, liberty and hunger to labour, servitude and plenty," Thompson summed up. "They make dangerous enemies when they escape because of the knowledge of the farms they have gained."

However, a loyal Bushman shepherd must have been a treasure; for he knew exactly where to find grazing and brought his sheep back in fine condition. Bushman servants on the farms were paid only in food.

When did the war against the Bushmen end? Certainly the Bushmen were still a force to be reckoned with in certain northern areas at the period of the Great Trek. Long afterwards there were occasional forays and murders. In the remote Prieska district as late as 1881 a farmer named Barend Burger was killed by a poisoned arrow. A few years later Bushmen attacked a police patrol in the Northern Cape, and the life of Constable Stapleton was saved by his officer, Captain Bellew, who sucked the arrow poison out of the wound.

So it was not surprising that some border farmers clung to the idea that Bushmen should be shot at sight. There was an affair near the Orange River in which a force under Commandant van Niekerk shot nearly fifty Bushmen, including some women and children; but an inquiry started

by the Victoria West magistrate ended in charges against the burghers being withdrawn.

In 1883 four Bushmen (a man and his wife, his sister and one child) were shot dead by the three brothers Steyn near Kenhardt. The corpses were found by members of the Northern Border Police, and the three brothers were charged with murder before a judge and jury at the Criminal Sessions in Cape Town. Funds were raised in the country for the defence. The brothers declared that the Bushman was wanted for stock theft, and that they were obliged to shoot to prevent him from escaping. All three were acquitted amid cheers.

Thus for almost a century the farmers on the Cape frontier regarded the wild Bushmen as deadly enemies. The most intense period of the war was the last three decades of the eighteenth century; but only when the last shattered clans of the little people had crept away into the Kalahari sands did the white families on isolated farms achieve a real sense of security.

Tales of the Bushman war are among the traditions of the old karoo families. One beloved ouma after another, sitting in her chair by the fire, has passed on these stories of the trek long ago from some pleasant corner of the old Cape, over the passes on to the plains; stories of the wagon life; memories of hazardous childhood and the atrocities of Bushman raiders.

They were ghastly memories. In the remote Zak Rivier district on the edge of Bushmanland, a field cornet named Steenkamp was the victim of a sudden attack. With him in the little homestead were his wife and fourteen children. All day he defended them, his wife firing one of the guns, the children loading. Then in the evening Steenkamp was struck by a poisoned arrow and died. For some reason the Bushmen retired without killing the rest of the family.

Avantine was a Bushman chief who kept the whole Nuweveld in terror for months. He sent threatening messages to all the scattered farms, so that no husband dared leave his family unguarded. Avantine's end was as bloody as his

own deeds. He was torn to pieces by the dogs of Hans Bezuidenhout.

Bushmen tortured many of their victims, especially Hottentots found in charge of the white men's cattle. The Bushmen tore out their fingernails, scalped them, and finally dragged out their bowels.

One commando, finding it impossible to come to grips with the Bushmen, killed a hippo and left it on the river-bank as bait. From their hiding-place they saw the Bushman spies examining the carcase and hurrying off to spread the news. When the Bushmen came to the feast they fell into the ambush and more than a hundred were shot down with many of their women and children. Only five escaped by swimming.

When a commando attacked a Bushman cave they used shields of plaited branches or closely-woven mats to ward off the poisoned arrows. Storming parties were covered by the finest marksmen, but rushing a cave often meant

casualties. Sometimes a cave was blocked with brushwood and the Bushmen were smoked out or smothered. Seldom did a Bushman ask for mercy. If he were shot through an arm he would use his foot to draw his bow.

The last stand of the Bushmen in the Sneeu Berg made a saga which is still told in the district after a century and a half. All but one Bushman clan had departed or made peace with the farmers. This clan, having retreated into the mountains with some stolen cattle, was surrounded by the pursuing commando. The Bushmen were cut off among the rocks at the edge of a precipice, and here they turned at bay for the last time.

One after another the Bushmen fell as the sharpshooters fired. Dying and dead rolled over a projecting ledge as the commando pressed home the attack, until only one Bushman remained alive. This man stood on the farthest point of the overhanging rock, in position where no member of the commando dared to follow. The commando stopped firing as the last of the

Bushmen shouted defiance with his last arrow on the string. It was an act of such bravery that the commando leader called to him, offering to spare his life if he would surrender. "A chief knows how to die!" retorted the Bushman, releasing the arrow and jumping headlong over the precipice. For many years afterwards the whitening bones of the Bushmen were to be seen on the inaccessible ledges.

Another dramatic episode was the extermination of the Bushmen in the Cradock district as late as the eighteen-thirties. The raiders had been coming down from their mountain lairs and stealing horses, and the government agreed to a punitive commando.

More than a hundred burghers under the redoubtable old Commandant Louw Pretorius cornered the main body of Bushmen in their great ancestral cave. The approach was difficult owing to thick bush in the ravines, and the mouth of the cave was screened by trees. Pretorius disposed his commando so that the Bushmen could not escape, and then sent

his interpreter to parley, with the enemy and offer terms of surrender.

The interpreter, a courageous lad of fourteen named Jacobus du Plessis, walked alone into the cave and gave his message. Korel, the chief, was a one-eyed Bushman with a great reputation as a bowman. He used a large bow and long arrows, and often secured a kill at one hundred and thirty yards. Du Plessis found Koral sitting in a circle of his warriors. The young envoy was treated with respect, and Korel listened carefully. "I can promise you and your people safe conduct to my commandant," said Du Plessis. "It is hopeless to resist. Your lives will be spared."

Korel had no confidence in the white man's mercy. When young Du Plessis had used every possible argument, Korel rose and exclaimed: "Go! Be gone! Tell your commandant that I am not a child, and that I have a strong heart. Go! Be gone! My last words are that I have a quiver full of arrows, and I shall defend myself as long as I have life left. Go! Be gone!"

No sooner had Du Plessis returned to the commando than the attack began. Burghers crept up under cover of shields, but there were many casualties. Seven men of the commando were killed by Korel's arrows, and the attackers fell back. Pretorius became worried about this failure. His second-in-command, Nicolaas Erasmus, then suggested that a more effective screen against the poisoned arrows might be improvised by using the coarse, heavy, woollen duffel cloaks which the men had with them. Thirty volunteers crept forward carrying a long framework covered with coats; and as the arrows struck, they became entangled and hung down like bristles. Sharpshooters were posted to deal with any Bushmen who exposed themselves, and under cover of the cloaks the column of men broke into the cave. Korel fell dead. His followers went on fighting until the last man had been killed.

Pretorius then led his commando in search of other Bushmen outposts and located another

cave where a chief known as Uithaalder defied them for days. A frontal attack would have been impossible without serious loss of life, so the commando sat down to starve the Bushmen out. Escape seemed to be out of the question, for the cave was set in the face of a precipice. Nevertheless, the Bushmen scaled that precipice in the darkness, every man, woman and child. Silently they carried their little possessions along ledges where even a baboon might have been baffled. They were never seen again in the Cradock district.

Not every expedition was so fortunate. A hunting party of white farmers rode to the Orange River near Pella to shoot hippo, and were ambushed by Bushmen while returning through a narrow pass in the Kaabas mountains. Most of the hunters were killed by showers of poisoned arrows and stones. I have walked through that menacing pass, with the mountains rising sheer a thousand feet from the sand on both sides. To this day, the people of Pella mission told me, the pass is called by its old Bushman name, meaning "the

Shouting of the Big Men." Sometimes the nights along the Orange River are weird, and you can almost hear the echoes of those cries of anguish.

All the battles of the Bushmen were not with the white men. In the Calvinia district there is a narrow mountain defile called Moordenaar's Poort, where Bushmen murdered several white farmers. Close by, six large cairns mark the scene of a desperate fight between Bushmen and Hottentots long before the first white trekboers entered the country.

Kaffirs and other native races in the east looked upon the Rishmen as beasts of prey and gave no quarter. Korannas in the eighteen-thirties were still capturing Bushman children and selling them into slavery for guns or brandy. Often the heartless Korannas made eunuchs of the Bushman boys to tame them. Landdrost (later Sir Andries) Stockenroom described a scene within his own experience when Kaffirs and Bastards attacked a Bushman clan. "They murdered the Bushmen and their women by the most abominable torture, threw those children

which were too young to live without nursing on a heap, covered them with straw and burnt them to death," Stockenstroom reported. "Some grown-up ones they cut the flesh from off the bottom of their feet and left them to starve, and such children as could serve them they carried off."

George William Stow studied not only Bushman relics and paintings but the survivors of the race. When the long war ended, a few tired old people found their way back like homing animals to the great caves of their ancestors. They came in summer to gather honey from the high crevices where the bees had made their hives from time immemorial.

Stow once encountered a centenarian Bushman among the rocks of his fathers near the Orange River. "He was the oldest looking man I had even seen," Stow noted. "He had more the appearance of a skeleton with a shrivelled parchment skin drawn over it. He looked like a man of past ages revisiting the earth, a fossil man."

That ancient Bushman had seen the coming of the commandos, the disappearance of his clan, the loss of the old hunting grounds. But he spoke bravely to Stow of earlier times, and ended proudly. "We are free men," he said. "We love the sun."

CHAPTER 3 THE SPRINGBOK MIGRATIONS

*The countless springboks are my flock
Spread o'er the unbounded plain.*

-Thomas Pringle

THOSE vast springbok migrations which devastated the karoo districts of South Africa almost up to the end of last century must have formed the most dramatic scenes in the whole world of mammals.

One cannot see everything, but I am sorry these cavalcades of fur and flesh occurred before my time. There was a *trekboer* once, a natural artist as a story teller, whose tale gave me the human side of it; one of those tales

which carried the ring of personal experience in every vivid detail.

This man had left the Transvaal with his family in the eightenseventies as a boy of ten. They were members of the first "Thirstland trek," a group of people impelled by real or imaginary grievances, and certainly by a restless spirit, to seek a new country. Many died in the desert. Some reached Angola. But this family of Van der Merwes broke away from the ill-fated wagons and headed south. They spent their lives trekking with their sheep and cattle in search of grass. When the old people died, the son Gert went on living the only life he knew; sometimes in Bechuanaland, in the Kalahari and often in the North West Cape. By the time he was twenty-one he had a wife and three children, two coloured shepherds and a Bushman *touleier* to lead the oxen and find the way from one water-hole or vlei to the next.

One morning Gert van der Merwe's wagon was plodding along the dry, hard bed of the

Molopo river where it forms the southern border of the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Gert noticed that the Bushman seemed worried about something. In the middle of the morning the Bushman left his oxen suddenly and ran off into the bush on the high northern bank of the river. At noon Gert stopped for the usual outspan and meal. His wife had just settled down to the cooking when the Bushman raced into camp and urged the party to inspan and follow him immediately. "The *trekbokke* are coming," the Bushman declared. "It will be death to stay in the river-bed."

Gert packed up, wondering whether the alarm was justified, but remembering that he had his family with him. The Bushman led the wagon out of the river-bed, up the north bank to a hill. Van der Merwe drove the wagon up the hill as far as the oxen would pull it. Then they went to the summit of the hill and the Bushman pointed.

At first Gert could see nothing unusual, but later he observed a faint cloud of dust along the horizon. It was miles away and did not suggest

any great danger to him. However, the Bushman persuaded him to cut and pile thorn bushes as a barrier round the wagon and cattle. The Bushman explained that if the running springbok came over the hill instead of round it they would trample every living thing in their path to death. However, he hoped the thorn bush and the wagon would make them swerve.

After protecting his wagon and stock, Gert climbed the hill again. By now the dust was only a few miles away, rising high in the air and spread over a wide front. Gert's hill appeared to be in the centre of the oncoming game. Now, for the first time, he felt a little nervous, for he realized that anything could happen if such a stampede passed through the camp. So he ordered his wife and children into the wagon and made the dogs fast under the wagon tent. With the aid of the two coloured men and the Bushman he gathered heaps of dry wood and placed them in front of the wagon. By throwing green stuff on top of each pile he hoped to send

up enough smoke to startle the buck and cause them to swing aside.

Gert waited on the hill summit. The buck were still hidden in their dust screen, but hares and jackals and other small animals were racing past the hill and taking no notice of the human beings. Snakes were out in the open, too, moving fast and seeking cover under the rocks on the hill. Gert and his men threw stones at the snakes that came too close, but the snakes seemed to be dominated by a greater fear. Meerkat families and field mice also appeared in large numbers.

At last came a faint drumming. No doubt the Bushman had sensed this drumming hours before, with his ear to the ground. Only now could Gert hear it. The cloud of dust was dense and enormous, and the front rank of the springbok, running faster than galloping horses, could be seen. They were in such numbers that Gert found the sight frightening. He could see a front line of buck at least three miles long, but he could not estimate the depth. Ahead of the

main body were swift voorlopers, moving along as though they were leading the army.

When the buck came within a mile of the hill the Bushman ran to the wagon and climbed in despite the growling of the dogs. He was taking no chances. Gert and the coloured men then moved back, pausing only to light the fires. They remained with the cattle, which had sensed the danger and were milling round and lowing nervously. Gert's wife wanted him inside the wagon; but he was gripped by the vast spectacle and climbed on to the hood for a better view.

The first solid groups of buck swept past on both sides of the hill. After that the streams of springbok were continuous, making for the river and the open country beyond. Then the pressure increased, the buck became more crowded. No longer was it possible for them to swerve aside when they reached the fires and the wagon. Gert said he could have flicked the horde with his whip from where he sat on the wagon tent. Some crashed into

the wagon and were jammed in the wheels, injured and trampled upon. The wagon became the centre of a mass of dead and dying buck; and Gert saw more biltong than he could have secured in a year's expensive shooting. But the thorn barrier had broken, and the buck were among the cattle. Before long the terrified, bellowing cattle stampeded and vanished into the dust in the direction of the river. Gert had to let them go. There was only death for anyone who ventured after them among the horns and hooves of the buck.

At the height of the rush, said Gert, the noise was overwhelming. Countless hooves powdered the surface to fine dust, and everyone found it hard to breathe. Gert's wife, who had been watching the rush with frightened interest, had to draw the blankets over herself and the children. The dust had almost smothered them. Everything in the wagon was an inch deep in pale yellow dust, and the Coloured men had also turned yellow.

Within an hour the main body of springbok had passed, but that was not the end of the spectacle. Until long after sunset, hundreds upon hundreds of stragglers followed the great herd. Some were exhausted, some crippled, some bleeding. Gert wondered what had happened to the hares and jackals, and the snakes which had not taken cover in time. Next day he found the answer.

All night lone buck passed the wagon. The air cleared, but dust rose again when there was any movement in the camp. At daybreak Gert climbed the hill to see whether he could find his cattle. He had food, and there was a water-hole not far away in the dry river-bed; but without the oxen he was stranded.

The morning air was so clear, the day so bright, that Gert felt for a moment as though the events of the previous day had a nightmare quality. Then he saw that the landscape, which had been covered with trees of fair sizes, green with food for his cattle, were gaunt stumps and bare branches. The

buck had brushed off all herbage in their passing, and splintered the young trees so that they would never grow again.

Far in the distance Gert thought he could see a few of his oxen. After breakfast he set off with his men to recover them. Every donga leading into the river, every little gully was filled with buck. It seemed that the first buck had paused on the brink, considering the prospects of leaping across. Before they could decide, the ruthless mass was upon them. Buck after buck was pushed into the donga, until the hollow was filled and the irresistible horde went on over the bodies.

Other sights reminded Gert of the fate he and his family had escaped by accepting the Bushman's warning. Small animals were lying dead everywhere - tortoises crushed almost to pulp, fragments of fur that had been hares. A tree, pointing in the direction of the advancing buck, had become a deadly spike on which two springbok were impaled.

For a fortnight Gert camped on that hill beside the Molopo, searching for his cattle. He found half of them. The fate of the others remained a mystery. They might have been borne along by the impetus of the stampede until they fell and were trampled to death; or they might have escaped from the living trap far away from the wagon. Gert inspanned the survivors thankfully and the wagon rolled on, away from the scene of destruction. When he told the tale, it was clear that he regarded it as the most memorable episode in a life which he regarded as the finest on earth. "*Ons lewe lekker. Dit is vir ons heeltemal goed genoeg*," declared Gert at the end of his story. "We live well. It is absolutely good enough for us.

Such was the experience which came unbidden to farmers and their families, usually in lonely places, though nowadays it is hard to find anyone who watched the stampede. There are legends which men heard from their

fathers and grandfathers. I am never satisfied with a legend when I can find the living memory, so I sought more survivors, men in their seventies and eighties. Two of them were over ninety, and they had seen a lot; but they spoke to me in wonder of the *trekbokke*.

I know that the mighty elephants set out on slow migrations, sometimes in large herds. The great treks of the North American bison, the caribou moving northwards, were marvellous sights. The little lemmings of Norway, descending from their mountain homes in millions to lay waste the countryside, have been studied and discussed for hundreds of years. But the springbok also moved resolutely over wide areas in millions. They, too, were drowned in thousands when they came to rivers or the sea.

I once met a man who kept a store on the banks of the Orange River late last century. He saw the springbok form a living bridge over the river as they raced towards the Kalahari "to reach better pastures," so he said.

Many perished so that the main body might cross with dry hooves on their backs.

Then there was an ex-trooper of the old Cape Police named Cochran who had to patrol the south bank of the Orange River in 1897, along a fence put up in the hope of keeping the rinderpest out of the Cape Colony. Cochran saw the migrating springbok charge the fence along a front of five hundred yards and bring it down. The leading springbok fell and were trampled and crushed; and the stench was so revolting that a gang of Hottentots had to be employed digging trenches and burying the buck. "I collected two pairs of enormous springbok horns from the dead at the fence," Cochran told me. "They were so large that everyone wanted to buy them. Some of the young troopers with me flogged their souvenirs in the Upington bars for a few bottles of lager. I got six pounds for mine, but I should have taken them to England and given them to a museum. They were record horns."

That year, too, Cochran watched thousands of springbok trekking through Kenhardt village. Everyone in the place seemed to be shooting from his stoep. It was probably the most devastating migration within living memory. Police gave the alarm and distributed ammunition to farmers at half-price. The damage was tremendous, but it might have been worse. For the invasion ceased suddenly. The springbok horde turned and raced back to the Kalahari. It was said that rain had fallen behind them; and the north wind had brought them, over hundreds of miles, the irresistible smell of damp earth and young grass.

A farmer in the Calvinia district pointed out to me a plateau which rose gradually from the plain but ended in a precipice. Long ago, he said, the Bushmen saw thousands of springbok feeding there during a migration. They drove them cleverly towards the precipice, and then shot an arrow at one buck near the edge. As they expected, the panic-stricken wounded buck jumped over the precipice, and the herd

instinct impelled thousands of buck to follow. Thus the Bushmen secured the greatest feast of last century. They sent word far and wide to the clans, they gorged and they danced. For years the bones of the springbok lay in deep depressions at the foot of the precipice.

Trained naturalists seem to have missed the springbok migrations. Thus the scientific picture can be built up only from hearsay and the scanty records left by farmers, hunters and travellers. John Millais painted the buck, but very few cameras were turned on the massed herds. Descriptions are vivid enough and tally extremely well until you come to the point where the observers try to explain the migrations.

The migratory springbok belonged mainly to the old Cape Colony. They were common in the Orange Free State and Transvaal, but the enormous herds were found in the Kalahari and the Karoo. Van Riebeeck and his men never saw a springbok. It was less than two centuries ago that the English gardener,

Francis Masson of Kew, gave the earliest description of this antelope. Masson accompanied Dr. Thunberg into a country called "Koud Bokke Veld" or "cold country of antelopes, so named from a species called springbock." Masson declared: "This animal when hunted, instead of running, avails itself of surprising springs or leaps."

During a later journey, Masson reported that since the Cold Bokkeveld had been settled by white people the springbok were no longer so plentiful. Once in seven or eight years, however, the springbok came in flocks of many hundreds of thousands from the interior, spreading over the whole country and not leaving a blade of grass or a shrub. Peasants were obliged to guard their cornfields night and day, or the springbok would cause a famine wherever they passed.

Masson remarked that the migrating springbok were always followed by lions. "It is observed, where a lion is, there is a large open space," he wrote. (A later observer declared

that a lion borne onward by the avalanche of buck was crushed to death, though it left much evidence of its wrath.) Masson himself admitted that he never saw more than twenty springbok in a herd; but he met a party of Dutchmen who had been pursuing Bushmen, and they informed him that they had seen great flocks of springbok to the north.

Then comes the first of many theories. Masson thought the springbok were forced southwards by dry seasons. When rain fell they returned to the interior. Thomas Pringle the poet formed the same opinion about half a century later, when he saw the face of the country near the Little Fish River speckled with springbok as far as the eye could reach. "We calculated we had sometimes within view not less than twenty thousand of these beautiful animals," Pringle recorded. "They were probably part of one of the great migratory swarms which, after long-continued droughts, sometimes inundate the colony from the northern wastes."

Landdrost (afterwards Sir Andries) Stockenström of Graaff-Reinet wrote to the Colonial Secretary about the springbok in 1821, a great drought year. "They have come from the parched desert in such droves that all numerical description must appear exaggerated," he reported. "An eye witness can only believe the fact that farms have been left on account of the exhausted state to which they have been reduced by these animals, which rendered the support of cattle on the same farms impossible."

Stockenström also wrote to Pringle on the subject. "It is scarcely possible for a person admiring the springbok thinly scattered over the plains to figure to himself that these ornaments of the desert can often become as destructive as locusts," he wrote. "The incredible numbers which sometimes pour in from the north during protracted droughts, distress the farmer inconceivably."

When the springbok approached (said Stockenström) the farmers surrounded their

fields with heaps of dry manure, the fuel of the Sneeuwberg, and set fire to it in the hope that the hordes would turn aside from the smoke. This seldom proved effective. Often the buck carried flocks of sheep along with them in the mad stampede, and the owners never saw them again.

Stockenström gave much thought to the mystery and stated boldly that although the farmers were baffled, he had solved the migration problem. The springbok, he pointed out, multiplied in the deserts to the south of the Orange River. There the herds were undisturbed save by an occasional Bushman hunter. Finally the desert swarmed with buck. Then a drought would leave the water-holes empty and the soil parched. Thirst drove the springbok out of the desert, and they returned only when rain had fallen on their secluded plains.

That was Stockenström's view. Not long afterwards the hunter, Major Cornwallis Harris, saw the Griqualand West area "literally

white with springbucks, myriads of which covered the plains." He summed up: "On the failure during drought of the stagnant pools on which the springbucks rely, they pour down like the devastating curse of Egypt from their native plains in the interior."

Sir John Fraser, whose father was the Dutch Reformed Church minister at Beaufort West in 1849, left a memorable impression of the springbok invasion of the village in that year. A *smous* drove into the village one day looking bewildered, and told the people that countless buck were on the way, leaving the veld bare. This report was not taken seriously. Soon afterwards the people of Beaufort West were awoken one morning by the trampling of all kinds of game. Springbok filled the streets and gardens, and they were accompanied by wildebeest, blesbok, quagga and eland. For three full days the *trekbokke* passed the village, and they left the veld looking as though it had been consumed by fire.

Some observers have stated that a migration usually started with small herds of springbok becoming restless and seeking their own kind. They gathered in larger and larger herds, moving as inevitably as the tides. Sometimes the *trekbokke* sauntered along their instinctive paths. The kids travelled in a sort of migrating nursery on one side of the main body of buck; and at intervals the ewes would visit them and suckle their young. Suddenly huge groups of buck would take fright and begin "pronking", with backs arched, in twenty-foot leaps. Then came the stampede, all dashing along faster than horses and even more gracefully. They grazed hungrily but hastily and passed on leaving only torn earth. On the farms they broke through any wire fencing they encountered; though it was only towards the end of last century that they met this obstruction. Fearlessly they surged between homesteads and outbuildings. They filled the dams and trampled their drowning and their dead ruthlessly in the mud.

David Livingstone watched a small migration in 1875, and formed his own opinion. He discovered that the springbok often left their northern areas at a time when grass and water were plentiful. "The cause of the migration seems to be their preference for places where they can watch the approach of a foe," suggested Livingstone. "Oxen are often terrified in high grass. The springbok possesses this feeling in an intense degree and becomes uneasy as the Kalahari grass grows tall. Vegetation being scantier in the more arid south, the herds turn in that direction. As they advance and increase in numbers the pasturage gets so scarce that they are obliged to cross the Orange and become a pest of the sheep farmer in a country which contains little of their favourite food."

I found confirmation of Livingstone's theory in the more recent observations of G.W. Penrice, a naturalist who studied the springbok herds in the coastal belt of Angola. "At certain seasons they congregate in one vast herd and

trek to some other veld where they again disperse into smaller troops," Penrice wrote. "One never finds springbok in country where there is high grass; they seem to like to be able to see all round. During one year of exceptionally heavy rain on the coast the grass grew very long, which resulted in all the buck trekking farther south to a more sandy veld."

The author and poet, William Charles Scully, was magistrate of Springbokfontein in Namaqualand when the last springbok migrations came that way. He, too, had a theory. He said that although the motive seemed to have puzzled hunters and naturalists from time immemorial, the explanation was really simple and obvious. Rain fell in Bushmanland in summer, but the winter was rainless. Bushmanland was bounded on the west by granite mountains rising from the sandy plain. "Here no summer rains fall, but in early winter the south-west wind brings soaking showers, and the sandy plains lying among the mountains become clothed for a few

weeks with rich, succulent vegetation," Scully went on. "This occurs at the season when the springbuck fawns are born, and when, consequently, the does require green food. Hence the westward `trek', which is, I believe, of hoar-ancient origin."

Scully described the most sensational of all recorded springbok migrations (in 1892) which ended in the South Atlantic. "The springbucks as a rule live without drinking," he pointed out. "Sometimes, however - perhaps once in ten years - they develop a raging thirst and rush madly forward until they find water. It is not many years ago since millions of them crossed the mountain range and made for the sea. They dashed into the waves, drank the salt water, and died. Their bodies lay in one continuous pile along the shore for over thirty miles, and the stench drove the trekboers who were camped near the coast far inland."

Some farmers in the track of the *trekbokke* believed that the movement was due to disease, such as *brandsiekte* (scab) or rinderpest. There

is evidence that the rinderpest years of 1896-97 left the springbok untouched, though *brandsiekte* was certainly present in some of those shot. But the theory of illness is complicated by clear evidence that while the *trekbokke* looked emaciated in certain years, during other treks they were obviously sleek and healthy.

Mr. S. C. Cronwright-Schreiner (Olive Schreiner's husband) made a determined attempt to solve the mystery during the 1896 migration, the last of the great cavalcades of *trekbokke* ever seen. Travelling by Cape cart in the wake of the migration, he found every homestead festooned with biltong. It was estimated that hundreds of thousands of buck had been shot in the Prieska district alone that year, and nearly as many wounded. Motherless springbok kids were dying by the thousand. Yet the migration went on - in millions.

It baffled Cronwright-Schreiner. He studied the works of Darwin and Lloyd Morgan on migration, investigated all the South African

opinions on the subject, and finally declared: "I do not think they afford sufficient evidence to justify any hard-and-fast conclusion. It is a fact that there are not sufficient, carefully collected, intelligently considered and rigorously tested facts to enable us to come to any definite conclusion as to the whole 'mentality' of these treks. Shall we now ever obtain such facts?"

No one plotted the springbok migration routes accurately, so that significant evidence on that point has been lost. It is believed that they never went back on their tracks, but travelled a huge square or oval. No one knows how long a trek lasted, though it has been stated that the *trekbokke* were always back in their original haunts within six months to a year. The speed of a migrating horde varied considerably. One hundred miles may have been an ordinary day's trek. The buck were capable of covering much greater distances.

Karoo farmers last century firmly believed in two varieties of springbok - the lean *trekbok* and the fatter *houbok* (about fifteen pounds

heavier), which remained in one area. Such a reliable observer as Scully mentioned shooting a *houbok* in the Richtersveld which was nearly twice as large as the springbok of the desert. The adult springbok ram weighs from seventy to eighty pounds and seldom more than ninety. Only one species of springbok is found in South Africa, known to scientists as *Antidorcas marsupialis marsupialis*; and it has been established that differences in weight are simply due to age and condition. In South West Africa, however, the springbok is of a heavier sub-species.

While farmers and trekboers did not always welcome the springbok invasions, they were able to profit or at least balance their losses by laking heavy toll of the herds. Convoys of wagons, carrying whole families, incepted the *trekbokke*, muzzle-loaders went into action, and one bullet often killed more than one buck.

This was hunting on a gigantic scale, and nowhere else in the world has such slaughter been known. Each group of hunters' would

form an old-fashioned laager with the Cape carts and wagons outspanned in the shape of a large horse-shoe. Men and boys would ride out to prey on the fringe of the migration. The women would help with the skinning and cutting of the biltong.

For decades last century each springbok skin fetched sixpence at the store. (The thin leather was used for bookbinding.) Biltong was threepence a pound, and it was a lean springbok indeed which did not provide eight pounds of dried biltong. Backhouse, in 1839, recorded that in the market at Cradock fresh springbok fetched thirteen pence apiece. There were long periods when a fat springbok could be bought in the karoo villages for one shilling and sixpence.

Were there really millions of buck in these migrations? Some naturalists have doubted whether the springbok could ever have existed in the numbers which staggered the early travellers. Descriptions of the *trekbokke*, however, are at least unanimous on this point.

One of the finest accounts was given a century ago by that picturesque hunter Gordon Cumming, old Etonian, cavalry officer, red-bearded and kilted Scot. He travelled by ox-wagon and shot mercilessly for five years, at a time when South Africa was indeed a hunter's paradise and no one seemed to realise that some of the animals would one day be exterminated. His bag was far larger than those of later, and more selective hunters such as Selous.

One night Gordon Cumming lay awake in his wagon for two hours before the dawn, listening to the springbok grunting and realising that a large herd was feeding near the camp. When he rose, he found that it was no mere herd, but a dense, living mass of springbok marching slowly and steadily.

They were coming through a gap in the western hills, pouring through like a flood, and disappearing over a ridge. "I stood upon the fore-chest of my wagon for nearly two hours, lost in wonder at the scene," recorded

Gordon Cumming. "I had some difficulty in convincing myself that it was reality which I beheld, and not the wild picture of a hunter's dream. During this time the vast legions continued streaming through the neck in the hills in one unbroken compact phalanx.

"At length I saddled up and riding into the middle of them with my rifle and after-riders, fired into their ranks until fourteen had fallen, when I cried 'Enough'. We then retraced our steps to secure from the ever voracious vultures the venison which lay strewn along my track."

Gordon Cumming confessed that he could form no idea of the number of antelopes he beheld that day; but he has no hesitation in saying that "some hundreds of thousands were within the compass of my vision."

One of the boers in the area told Gordon Cumming : "You this morning beheld only one flat covered with springboks, but I have ridden a long day's journey over a succession

of flats covered with them as far as I could see, and as thick as sheep in a fold."

Scully was lost when it came to counting the springbok he saw in the 1892 migration. "In dealing with myriads, numbers cease to have any significance," he declared. "One might as well endeavour to describe the mass of a mile-long sand dune by expressing the sum of its grains in ciphers as to attempt to give the numbers of antelopes forming the living wave that surged across the desert and broke like foam against the western granite ridge."

Mr. T.B. Davie of Prieska recorded his impressions of four great springbok migrations between 1887 and 1896. "The whole country seemed to move, not in any hurry or rush, but a steady, plodding march, just like *voetganger* locusts," he declared. Mr. Davie saw the springbok in one continuous stream from Prieska to Draghoender (forty-seven miles), plodding on, and just moving aside far enough to avoid the wheels of his cart.

A family on the farm Witvlei had to sit round the well - their last water supply after the springbok had filled the dam - keeping the buck off with bullets and stones. In the end the thirsty springbok beat down the defence, and soon the well was packed with dead and dying buck.

That year the springbok poured through the main street of Prieska, and the magistrate sat on the steps of his courthouse and picked off a few good specimens with his rifle. Prieska was always in the path of the migration.

During the 1888 trek, Mr. Davie and his friend Dr. Gibbons made a deliberate attempt to estimate the numbers of *trekbokke*. They were on the farm Nels Poortje in the Prieska district when the sea of antelopes overwhelmed the district. In front of them was a kraal which, the farmer told them, held fifteen hundred sheep.

"Well," said Dr. Gibbons, "if fifteen hundred can stand there, then about ten thousand can

stand on an acre, and I can see in front of me ten thousand acres covered with buck. That means at least one hundred million buck. Then what about the miles upon miles around on all sides as far as the eye can reach covered with them."

They gave it up. No wonder men spoke of myriads of buck. During the 1896 trek, Cronwright-Schreiner and two other farmers (all accustomed to counting small stock) surveyed the springbok on a vast, open plain and tried to form an accurate estimate with the aid of field glasses. They counted section after section, and agreed that there were half a million springbok in sight at that moment. But the whole trek covered an area of one hundred and forty miles by fifteen miles. "When one says they were in millions, it is the literal truth," declared CronwrightSchreiner.

Millais, in his life of Selous, dealt with the wholesale destruction of game after the breech-loading rifle arrived in South Africa in the eighteen-seventies. He met a trader who

kept accurate records of the skins he handled; and between 1878 and 1880 this man exported nearly two million skins, mainly springbok.

Yes, there were millions of springbok on the move, millions of buck followed by lions and leopards, hyenas and jackals, and vultures to pick out the eyes of those that fell. When the *trekbokke* raced through a narrow poort, it meant death for any human being in their path. At the time of the Great Trek a frontier farmer found his three young sons and his Hottentot shepherd trampled to death on the veld after the buck had passed.

Nearly seventy years ago there was a Kalahari trader named Albert Jackson. He was still living in Port Elizabeth in recent years, and he told me one personal experience of the springbok migration which helped to bring the scene to life for me.

"I slept on the veld during the 1896 migration," Jackson recalled. "Often I put my

ear to the ground, and even at night, when the buck were resting, it felt like an earth tremor."

No longer is the springbok seen in millions. Yet the national emblem of South Africa, the only gazelle in the country, is in no danger of extinction. As recently as May 1954 large herds of springbok, possibly fifteen thousand buck, streamed out of the Kalahari and into the Gordonia district like the migratory swarms of last century. Farmers complained urgently that their fences were being broken and their grazing destroyed. The magistrate and a police officer flew over the invasion area and decided that there was no need to lift the ban on all hunting in force for three years in that district. Farmers would be allowed to fire their rifles to frighten the buck away - but only under police supervision.

Venison has a market value. In districts where shooting is allowed, farmers preserve their springbok herds carefully, and the guest who disobeys the rules at a springbok shoot will

never be asked again. Only the rams and the old ewes are killed.

Seldom now will you see fifty springbok shot on one farm in a day; yet in the nineties of last century one hunting party would bring in a thousand, twelve hundred buck between dawn and sunset. The migrations and the massacres have ended but the mystery remains.

CHAPTER 4 **RAILWAY ACROSS THE KAROO**

*Then out of De Doorns she thundered
and over the starved Karoo,
Dwindling the hills behind her, farther
and farther she flew;
And I know not which to praise the
more - these moon-shot hills of God
Or the genius of the men who planned
and made the glorious road.*

-John Runcie

WHEN, far too early, the steward rattled and snapped on the lights and came in with the strong aroma of railway coffee, it was the Great

Karoo. All through lunch, from *groentesop* to pumpkin fritters, it was karoo. You might linger over your afternoon tea, your dinner, your night-cap in the diningcar, but the landscape framed in the broad windows was still karoo, karoo, karoo. Even in the darkness it was unmistakable. And when the next dawn came, the train had not yet passed out of the Great Karoo.

Where have all the old karoo trains gone? Some of the primitive coaches remain beside the line stripped of their wheels and serving as huts for labourers. There must be all sorts of railway museum-pieces strewn about the karoo. Yet there was not a scrap of railway material, not a sign of a railway, in South Africa a century ago. It was on September 14, 1859 that the first small railway engine was landed on one of the Table Bay wharves. This was the "coffee pot" locomotive which now stands in a place of honour on the Cape Town station. With it came a character named William Dabbs, a driver of the old school, who remained in charge of that engine until he died.

Dabbs was a Scot, like his engine; a well-built man with a peak cap, a penetrating stare, thick beard, small bow tie, heavy Victorian waistcoat and massive watch-chain and plaid trousers. You will find a portrait of this foot-plate pioneer on the engine. Dabbs assembled his locomotive under a galvanised iron roof built in a corner of the Parade, and this became Cape Town's first railway station. One end of the platform was overhung by the fir trees at the edge of the Parade. In the station refreshment room the traveller could buy a mutton pie and a glass of ale for sixpence. The porter supplied his own uniform and had to live entirely on his tips. When the platform was completed it was discovered that someone had made a mistake; the platform was higher than the floors of the carriages and it had to be rebuilt.

It was the railway boom in England that brought the "iron horse" to the Cape. When the Cape of Good Hope Western Railway committee first met in London in 1845, there were no steel tracks in London and America's

railways were only three miles in length. Cape Town newspapers, however, did not welcome the idea at first. The "Mail" published a sarcastic leader suggesting a Cape to Cairo railway, and so far the sarcasm has been justified. Nevertheless a company was formed - no one thought of State railways in those days - and in 1858 the surveyors arrived in Cape Town.

Governor Sir George Grey walked under the triumphal arch and "turned the first sod" of the first railway in a field at Papendorp on March 31, 1859. More than six thousand people were present when the salute of twenty-one guns was fired. Cape Town watched a fireworks display that night, and tar barrels were set on fire.

More locomotives arrived, one of them named Argus, and huge gangs of railway navvies landed to carry on where the Governor had left off. Towards the end of 1860 the people of Cape Town were able to travel (in open trucks) to a church bazaar at Papendorp. Proper

coaches came the following year, and "The Argus" declared: "Railway carriages for the Cape Town - Wellington railway are equal to the best in England. The Governor's carriage is very handsomely fitted up." One secondclass coach was built at Salt River, " roomy, strong, well-made, and superior to anything yet seen in the Colony."

First-class passengers lolled back on two cushions and put their feet on a small carpet; in the second-class each passenger had one cushion; the third sat on the woodwork. Compartments were lit by oil-lamps. Smoking and card-playing were forbidden, and the regulations warned passengers against riding on the roof. Each compartment carried a detachable tin plate denoting the class, and humorists were always changing them, so that first class passengers stepped into third class compartments - and vice versa.

Two lines of rails left the Cape Town station. They passed between the Castle and a fine redoubt equipped with muzzleloading cannon

which were used to salute men-o'-war entering the bay. The system forked at Salt River, a single track leaving for the north, and the double track going on to Wynberg.

The first railway time-table was published early in 1862, when the line reached Eerste Rivier. It was bilingual, and gave details of four trains on weekdays and two on Sundays. Few who read it could have imagined that within seventy years the line would stretch from the little Liesbeek to the mighty Congo more than three thousand miles away.

Sir Philip Wodehouse, the Governor, opened the Eerste Rivier section, but on this occasion the railway company did not provide refreshments and there were no fireworks. A disappointed onlooker sent his views to one of the newspapers:

*The whole affair was very dreary,
Dear Public! I am weary, weary,
I would that I were dead.*

At first the train ran at such a solemn speed that a horsedrawn trap could race the "iron horse" to

Salt River and win. Farther out in the country, however, Dabbs would open the throttle and then the run became exciting. One early traveller wrote: "With a shrill scream the train rushed over the Flats at a rate which made the sand hills in the foreground dance a mad reel round those in the background." The top speed at that time was forty miles an hour. Many people refused to take the risk. There were complaints when the trains killed hens and pigs. Clergymen denounced the railway company for running Sunday trains.

Dabbs lived at a Long Street boarding-house, and often took a Native servant named Mitchell for a run on the footplate. The servant was allowed to polish the brasswork and blow the whistle. Such privileges were only possible on those early days. Mitchell lived beyond the century mark and saw the old engine become a museum-piece on the Cape Town station.

Inevitably, accidents occurred during the first year. A man had his foot crushed on the line and died. Then a workmen's train collided with trucks loaded with bricks; one labourer was thrown out

and injured. There were riots when rival gangs of imported navvies clashed. Engines were turned over and part of the track was torn up during a pitched battle at Salt River in which four hundred men took part. Some of the navvies, dissatisfied with their pay of six shillings a day, went on strike. But in spite of these incidents the line reached Stellenbosch in May 1862, to be greeted by a thousand people on the platform.

Soon afterwards the first of all South Africa's many washaways was recorded. During the winter of 1862 the railway bridge over the river near Stellenbosch gave way, and passengers had to transfer to another train.

The first excursion was organized to Stellenbosch, and another when Mr. Bennett offered 350 erven for sale at Bennettsville. You will search in vain for Bennettsville to-day; but at that time the township appeared to offer prospects and many people flocked to the sale. Mr. Bennett gave a "champagne tiffin" and took £2311. Bennettsville is now Klapmuts.

When the line reached Wellington in November 1863, hundreds travelled to the celebrations in three special trains. The whole Cape Volunteer Corps was there, with guns and horses for a military display. Bands played on station platforms as the trains arrived. It was a day of flags and flowers and red carpets. Privileged guests feasted in the Wellington goods shed.

As soon as the novelty of rail travel had worn off, however, passengers began to grumble about delays. The trains stopped at Salt River for twenty minutes, D'Urban Road (now Bellville) for twenty minutes, and for half an hour at Stellenbosch "to give the energetic vendors of coffee and buns ample time to ply their business." Then there was the fire danger, caused by sparks from the engines falling on thatch roofs beside the line. Directors of Cape Town insurance companies made a special trip in 1863 to assess the risk.

The railway remained a private enterprise until 1872, when it was purchased by the Cape Government for £773,000. The track was of the

European standard 4 ft. 8½ in gauge; and before long . the government decided that extensions would be too costly. So the 3 ft. 6 in. "Cape gauge" was adopted. An intermediate rail was inserted to avoid scrapping the original rolling stock; and until 1881 both wide and narrow trains used the line. The late Mr. C.W.H. Kohler of the K.W.V. once told me that the man responsible for the change to the narrower gauge was his uncle, Mr. Berks Hutchinson, a Cape Town dentist. Hutchinson had worked on railway construction in Canada, and he persuaded Sir Bartle Frere, the Governor, to make the change. It was a momentous decision, but it saved the country millions upon millions of pounds. The cost of carrying the broad-gauge line over the Hex River mountains into the Karoo would have been crushing in those days. Sharp curves can be negotiated with the "Cape gauge". Locomotive engineers have overcome many problems of size and weight and speed, so that our trains are the largest and fastest in the world running on the 3 ft. 6 in. gauge.

Worcester was linked by rail with Cape Town in June 1876. Governor Sir Henry Barkly spoke at the banquet, and in the evening there was a ball. Mr. W. G. Brounger, a fine railway engineer from England trained in the Stephenson tradition, was the man responsible for carrying the line on from Worcester into the Karoo. He was appointed Cape railway engineer in 1873, and he sent his field engineer, Mr. Wells Hood, off with a Cape cart and four horses to find a route over the mountains.

At the end of an enjoyable month in the open air, Wells Hood reported: "After very considerable climbing about the Hex River mountains, I have found a route that gives every facility for the construction of a cheap railway. No gradient is steeper than one in forty, and this only for a short distance. The most important work would be a tunnel of about ten chains in length which it would be impossible to avoid."

So the survey parties followed the line of Wells Hood's reconnaissance. The inevitable expropriation orders were served on angry farmers. It is amusing to compare the attitude of many karoo farmers in the early railway days with the deputations which now seek interviews with the Minister of Railways to plead for branch lines. Back in the eighteen-seventies and eighties the coming of the railway was often strenuously opposed. Anti-railway conferences were organised, and speakers warned the nervous gatherings that the "iron horse" would compete unfairly with transport riding and put horse-breeders out of business. Farmers also feared heavy taxation and encroachment on their property rights.

Another argument was that the new and easy means of communication would bring a flood of undesirables into the interior - or an invading army. Farmers who had never seen a train discovered something blasphemous in the invention. "God never intended human beings to be hurled along at twenty-five miles an

hour," they declared. And there was a widespread belief that the iron monsters of steam and fire would stampede cattle and sheep and render farms valueless. But the pioneer work went on.

Every fifty or one hundred feet a peg was driven into the ground to fix the actual centre of the track. Then came the earthworks and the plate-laying, the bolting together of sleepers and rails with the line advancing three thousand to five thousand feet a day. Ballasting, the packing of broken stone under the sleepers, had to wait for the construction train to come up with its loads from the quarry. Then the line was jacked up and the ballast packed tightly. Finally the stations and goods sheds and staff quarters were built, the drillers found water, the line was fenced and all was in readiness for the festooned engine, the flags and bunting and the champagne.

At the end of 1877 the Hex River mountains had been conquered and the line reached Touws River, then known as Montagu Road.

The railway aimed at the heart of the Great Karoo had cost less than half a million pounds.

A traveller during the construction period has left an account of the journey. Trains left Cape Town at seven-thirty in the morning and went no farther than Worcester that day. Passengers spent the night at Freislich's Hotel and Old Anthony called them early. Then the train moved on to railhead, where the Red Star and Cobb's coaches waited to carry passengers to the diamond fields.

Railway coaches of those days were short, with four wheels, popularly known as "buck jumpers". The traffic manager had a coupé with real leather upholstery. Ordinary passengers complained that train travel made their backs sore, but admitted that it was more comfortable than the post-cart.

More than two thousand immigrants from Europe were employed on the colonial railways at this time. One ship brought seventy Belgian workmen. Most of the professional

engineers had been trained in Britain; but it was a long time before anyone thought of drawing on the colony itself for unskilled labour.

No coal worth mentioning was mined in South Africa during the early years of the Cape railways. Welsh coal was used, and the Cape Government found it expensive. So the railway authorities decided to start their own forests and burn wood fuel in the locomotives. A large blue-gum plantation near Beaufort West failed; but other fuel forests near Worcester and Ceres and at Constantia were successful. Thus the Cape locomotives were able to cut down the import of Welsh coal. Only when coal was found in South Africa was the use of wood fuel abandoned.

As the railway line plunged deeper into the karoo, the farmers became reconciled to the new form of transport. But the sight of the first locomotives, roaring across the karoo at night in showers of sparks with the whistle going, was more than some of the primitive farm

labourers could stand. Shepherds of Bushman or Hottentot origin moved their huts away from the line. Some were so terrified that their employers never saw them again.

Beaufort West became the terminus in 1880, and the official lunch lasted four hours. Those were great days, and the quiet karoo village was transformed. Railway passengers found the Kimberley stage coaches waiting for them. There were wilder nights than any Beaufort West had known before, and episodes such as the classic fight with bare fists between Big O'Reilly from the diggings and "Sterk Jan" Venter, a local farmer. It all ended amicably in the nearest bar.

Two famous karoo railway passengers of last century recorded their impressions. Mark Twain wrote: "Easy riding, fine cars, all the conveniences, thorough cleanliness, comfortable beds furnished for the night trains." The other was Winston Churchill, who declared that railway travelling at the Cape

was more expensive but just as comfortable as in India.

Karoo trains have had special names and nicknames ever since the early days. The "Gunpowder Train" of the eighteen-seventies has its modern counterpart in the "Dynamite Train" of twelve sealed trucks which stops every thirty miles to allow the wheels to cool. A train which leaves Cape Town late at night for De Aar is known as the *Spooktrein*. But the most mysterious of all is the *Makkadas* train running on the branch line from Hutchinson to Calvinia. There are now many theories about this nickname, and the true origin seems to have been lost. Some say that a bygone fireman, bored by the slow pace, turned to his driver and exclaimed: "Make a dash!" Others believe the nickname arose from the sound of the wheels, turning slowly with a "mak-ka-das-das-das, mak-ka-das-das-das". Another *skilpadtrein*, between Oudtshoorn and Klipplaat, stops so often that the passengers call it *Toet-hier-gaan-ek-toet-hier-staan-ek*.

De Aar is the Great Karoo railway station that almost everyone in South Africa knows. It is also the place which most people remember only as a station. While railways run, De Aar must maintain its position as the most important junction in the Cape Province.

If I had a pound for every time I have paced De Aar platform from end to end I believe I could pay my fare round the world. De Aar lingers in my mind especially as the place where often I had to leave a steamy compartment at six on a winter's morning to wait for the Cape Town train. That was when I came south from South West Africa, again and again, and many thousands of freezing passengers have had the same bitter experience. You must have a fire when winter strikes De Aar, and the restaurant on the station provides one. Last time I was there, the fire was brighter than the breakfast.

The trains, the endless trains pass through De Aar, and the people of De Aar think no more of them than the passengers think of the town beside the station. Yet there were white people at De Aar long before the railway came. The town of De Aar has been growing up beside the railway line for more than half a century. De Aar may be only a railway platform to you. It is home to six thousand people. And it was once Olive Schreiner's home.

No doubt the Bushmen were the first inhabitants there, as they were everywhere on the karoo. They left their paintings on the rocks at Damfontein in the district. They were there when the first farms were allotted to trekboers in 1837. Two years later a certain "Swart" Jan Vermeulen took possession of the farm De Aar, on which the town was founded long afterwards. He left a reputation for hospitality beyond the ordinary kind. His grave and the ruins of his homestead are still to be seen. De Aar means "the vein, or artery", of

course, and thousands of sheep gathered at the well fed by the strong spring on this farm.

For forty years "Swart Jan" and his successors farmed quietly at De Aar. Only the ordinary karoo dramas, the long droughts and encounters with leopards, disturbed them. Nothing changed much until 1881, when the railway surveyors and construction gangs appeared on the scene. Then the old De Aar was no more. The empty karoo became a workshop. Fourteen hundred natives, Zulus and Fingoes, pitched their tents on the farm.

Some time before this development two farsighted brothers, Isaac and Wolf Friedlander, had arrived by ox-wagon from Cape Town and opened a store, and later a small hotel next door. It would be hard to find, even in fabulous South Africa, a country store which enriched its owners within two decades as did that little shack at De Aar. Isaac Friedlander became a member of the London Stock Exchange - and lost most of the fortune he had made at De Aar. But the Friedlander

brothers were great figures in the railway camp. Farmers who distrusted the banks left their money in the safe at the Friedlanders' store. During boom periods the Friedlanders often filled bucket after bucket with sovereigns in the course of the day's work.

De Aar was the scene of a bloody affair during the construction days. Zulu and Fingo labourers were kept as far apart as possible, both at work and off duty. One day, however, a clash occurred over a buck which had been run down by the Zulu and Fingo hunting dogs. Natives of both sides were killed in the fight, but this did not settle the matter. Tension mounted, the Zulus challenged the Fingoes again and again, and on Christmas Day 1883 there was an evenly-matched tribal battle with about four hundred natives on each side. They fought with pickhandles and axes, battles and assegais and kerries from a quince-hedge. No firearms were used, but after the fight there were sixty dead and many more wounded. The proud Zulus ran for their lives in the end.

Railway officials were unable to stop the fight, but they telegraphed to Cape Town for help. Some days later the so-called "De Aar Expedition" arrived, a large body of Cape Mounted Rifles under Colonel Southey.

Before the railway reached De Aar, the construction camp was known as "Number Six". Some documents of the period refer to "Von Brandis junction", the intention being to pay a compliment to the Transvaal official. But soon after the first train steamed into De Aar in March 1884, the station was named "Brounger Junction". A board bearing this name stood on the platform for some time. De Aar triumphed in the end, however, and the old name was officially restored. Nevertheless, it is a pity that the memory of such a fine engineer as Brounger should not have been perpetuated in some way along the line across the Great Karoo.

One of the stories told by the descendants of the Friedlanders is of an old man with a beard who called on Isaac Friedlander to hire a horse

and cart. He wished to visit a farmer named Hauptfleisch.

"You know that Hautfleisch is a Dopper, I suppose?" remarked Friedlander humorously.

"Yes, and so am I, " replied the stranger. He was President Paul Kruger.

The Friedlander brothers profited enormously from their De Aar enterprises, but they also gave building sites to the Dutch Reformed Church and other churches and provided for the town hall and sports grounds. Friedlander, Amalia and Jenny Streets remind to-day's residents of the family which once owned most of De Aar.

"At De Aar the uncertain part of our journey began," wrote Winston Churchill during the South African War. "Armoured trains patrolled the railway line; little groups of armed police guarded the bridges; infantry and artillery battalions garrisoned the village." In fact, there were eleven thousand men in the De Aar garrison. Thousands of horses were kept there

for despatch to the different fronts. The new school was turned into a military hospital. Kitchener and French often inspected the stronghold. Yet in spite of this formidable strategic centre, General Christiaan de Wet once succeeded in cutting all the De Aar lines of communication for several days.

De Aar's most famous resident was Olive Schreiner. Her husband Cronwright was law agent, town clerk and market master from 1904 to 1912. In spite of an early bioscope, where Olive Schreiner sat in her own Madeira chair, this particular couple found no inspiration in De Aar life. Cronwright Schreiner wrote of it, when he sold his business: "I could no longer endure the monotony and solitude of the uncongenial life at De Aar." He was succeeded as town clerk by Hendrik Hanekom, later to become famous as the Afrikaans actor.

No one passes through De Aar without noticing the number of windmills and the gardens karoo soil will provide when irrigated. No town in South Africa has battled more

desperately for water than De Aar. At one time there were more than three hundred private bore-holes, and two-thirds of them ran dry.

De Aar had to buy a whole village, Burgerville, twenty-one miles away, to solve the water problem. Burgerville had a church hall, school and post office, tree-lined streets, many comfortable homes and a population of three hundred. It also had a spring capable of supplying De Aar with a million gallons of water a day. De Aar was saved from a thirsty death. Burgerville, having sold its water, became a ghost village.

As recently as 1949 there were three De Aar residents who were all much older than the town. One was Piet van Niekerk, who tended his father's sheep on the site of the present railway station. Jan Vermeulen, a blacksmith and grandson of the first owner of De Aar farm was another; and the third was Oom Daniel Coetzee, who lost both legs working for the railways. He remembered the time when

leopards were caught in stone traps on farms in the De Aar district.

De Aar, the old railway camp, is one of the inland towns of the Cape which does not suffer from the migration to the cities. On the municipal coat-of-arms you will find a railway locomotive and a merino ram. With those two sources of wealth De Aar must flourish.

CHAPTER 5

LOGAN OF MATJESFONTEIN

MATJESFONTEIN is only a wayside station to most of you, a gateway to the Great Karoo linked with the name of Logan. Generations of main line travellers have glimpsed the row of red-brick houses which make Matjesfontein unlike any other dorp in South Africa. Within those houses are memories.

Not only Olive Schreiner, but other famous names belong to Matjesfontein's strange past. The whole place is stamped with the personality of James Douglas Logan, the "Laird of Matjesfontein", a patriarch in a

tradition of his own. He has been dead for thirtyfive years, and it is time his story was told.

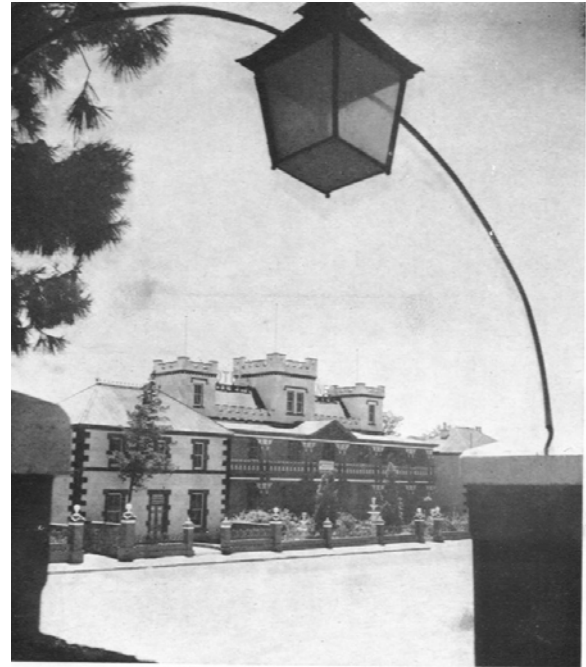
This vigorous Scot was born in Berwickshire in 1857, and set off to Australia in a sailing ship at the age of twenty. The ship put into Simon's Bay in distress and was wrecked. Jimmy Logan reached the shore with the clothes he was wearing and an abundant supply of self-confidence. He had worked as a clerk on the North British Railways, but the only railway post he could find in Cape Town was a porter's job at the new railway station, then under construction. By the time the building was finished, Jimmy Logan had become station-master. The next step, as district superintendent of the Touws River-Prince Albert Road section, took Logan into the Great Karoo for the first time.

Before leaving Cape Town he had married Miss Emma Haylett. He became interested in catering, resigned from the Cape Government Railways, bought an hotel in Touw's River and

a wholesale wine and spirit store in Cape Town. In the early eighties Logan decided to invest everything he had got in the Matjesfontein area. When he started there was just a corrugated iron shed beside the railway line. Land was cheap enough, for no one imagined that anything could be done with this desolate country on the karoo edge.

Logan paid four hundred pounds for the farm of three thousand five hundred morgen which he called Tweedside. You must have seen it, fifteen miles south of Matjesfontein, with its three unusual iron gates and long fence running for miles beside the railway line. Altogether he bought sixty thousand morgen, and most of these farms are still in the family. Tweedside was his favourite. He opened up the first artesian well in South Africa on that farm, sank drill-hole after drill-hole, and planted thousands of fruit trees in an area where no one had ever dared to attempt fruit-growing on a large scale. Cherries, pears and many other

varieties had come to the karoo. Gums and pines grew up by the thousand on Tweedside.



"Matjesfontein is only a wayside station to most of you, a gateway to the Great Karoo linked with the name of Logan." (Chapter Five.)

Logan had his own private railway siding on the farm. His farm labourers received free cottages on condition that they kept them clean. If Jimmy Logan found a sign of litter, however, the labourer paid ten shillings a month rent.

Meanwhile he was also developing Matjesfontein village. His own residence, Tweedside Lodge, was connected with the farm by the longest private telephone line in the colony.

The secret of Logan's fondness for Matjesfontein had its origin in his own weak chest, cured by the dry karoo air. He envisaged Matjesfontein as a great health resort. For some years doctors in England had been sending patients to Beaufort West, which was too dusty, and the Nuweveld mountains, where some found they were inhaling too much grass. Logan believed in the Matjesfontein climate and set about providing amenities.

"Mr Logan insists on his village being as clean as the deck of a ship," wrote an early visitor.

"It has the appearance of a smart London suburb, and close by are the golf links, cricket ground, tennis and croquet courts and swimming bath fed by a sulphur spring."

Matjesfontein was designed and built by Jimmy Logan. He imported London lampposts for street lighting, and they are still there. The village was the first in South Africa to have waterborne sewerage, and the first to be lit by electricity. Logan spent a thousand pounds tracing a watercourse on one of his farms. He discovered a supply that yielded eleven thousand gallons a day, a great find in the karoo, piped the water to Matjesfontein and sold water rights to the railways at a handsome profit. The shipwrecked youth was firmly on his feet.

Cape Town newspapers devoted columns in November 1889 to the opening of the Matjesfontein waterworks. Logan had invited scores of guests, and when he entertained it was done in the grand manner. The train bringing Lady Sprigg, Colonel Schermbrucker,

M.L.A. and many other leading politicians and personages, reached Matjesfontein in the morning. Jimmy Logan had organized a cricket match, rifle shooting, pigeon shooting, billiards, and tennis. The Worcester band was there. Shortly before lunch Lady Sprigg turned the wheel and a fountain played on the bare veld. "The luncheon served in the decorated railway shed would have done credit to a first-rate London hotel," declared a newspaper report. Colonel Schermbrucker declared that Logan had made a paradise in the desert. He hoped that Matjesfontein would become a large town. Another speaker suggested that the name of the place should be changed to Logansville. Mr. Logan replied modestly that it was not that he had done so much, but that in the karoo others had done so little.

During the nineties a stream of celebrated figures flowed up to Matjesfontein. I have never fully understood how this pilgrimage of English aristocrats to the tiny karoo dorp came about, but it was certainly another result of

Logan's drive and enterprise. It just became fashionable to make the sea voyage to the Cape and a trip to Matjesfontein. So I was shown Victorian albums filled with signed portraits of the great. Lord Randolph Churchill (father of Winston) was there in June 1891, a fine year for veld flowers. He picked bluebells on the koppies, borrowed a dog from Logan at the suggestion of Rhodes, and went on a shooting expedition to Rhodesia.

The Duke of Hamilton and many other titled people stepped off the mail train at this little village. I cannot imagine what brought the young Sultan of Zanzibar to Matjesfontein, but he was there, too, and Admiral Nicholson; and Admiral Rawson, who gave his name to Rawsonville; and Sir David Gill, the astronomer; James Stewart of Lovedale; all sorts of celebrities stayed at Jimmy Logan's hotel.

Olive Schreiner loved the place. She rented the villa which became known as Schreiner Cottage, next to the post office, and took her

meals at Logan's railway refreshment room - of which more will be heard. Here she posted her long letters to Havelock Ellis, and looked forward to his replies as she walked alone at dawn on the veld, feeling a "wild exhilaration" as the sun rose. Here, in 1890, Rhodes broke a journey to Kimberley so that he could dine with her.

It was at Matjesfontein that Olive Schreiner wrote "Thoughts on South Africa". She called her cottage "home", and wrote to Logan during one of her absences: "I shall be very glad to come back to dear old Matjesfontein." She gave Logan's son a book for boys inscribed: "From his very loving friend Olive Schreiner." And after hearing Jimmy Logan's stories of adventure on land and sea she advised him to write his autobiography and offered to edit it for him. South African literature has lost rich pages owing to the unwillingness of such characters as Jimmy Logan to put their experiences on paper.

Logan became a great patron of cricket at this period. He arranged the two visits of Lord Hawke's teams to South Africa - they played at Matjesfontein, of course - and he accepted the entire financial responsibility when the early South African cricket teams toured England. When George Lohmann, greatest English cricketer of his day, broke down in health, Logan offered him a home and an engagement at Matjesfontein. The change to the crisp karoo prolonged Lohmann's life for years.

Those were the days before railway dining-cars at the Cape, and passengers took their meals hurriedly at refreshment rooms. In 1892 Sir James Sivewright, Minister of Railways, gave the catering contract to his friend Logan without calling for tenders or informing any of his ministerial colleagues. This caused a political crisis of the first magnitude. Sivewright defended his action on the ground that tenders had not always been invited in the past. Moreover he argued that Logan was an admirable caterer.

Nevertheless, Sivewright had to resign and the contract was cancelled. Logan then sued the government and was awarded five thousand pounds damages with costs. Merriman and Sauer resigned. The cabinet disrupted by the Logan contract had been known as "the ministry of all the talents". Rhodes had to dissolve and re-form his ministry without three of the talented members.

During the official inquiry into the catering contract, Logan stated that he had invested twenty thousand pounds in refreshment rooms all the way up the line from Wellington to Bulawayo. He had intended to spend a further thirty thousand pounds to make these rooms "second to none in the world". Matjesfontein had the best refreshment room of the lot. Nothing was too good for Matjesfontein. Logan served two breakfasts there - one at three shillings and sixpence, where travellers went for "quiet and high-toned society", and a half-crown breakfast for other customers. He had planned a school of railway cookery, to be

established at Matjesfontein with a skilled chef in charge.

Another typical Logan enterprise, carried out successfully for years, was the Matjesfontein mineral water factory. There he made all the soda water, lemonade and ginger ale for thirsty karoo railway travellers. The old plant is one of Matjesfontein's many relics.

After his indirect but sensational appearance in Cape politics, Mr. J.D. Logan entered the Old Cape House in person as Progressive M.L.A. for Worcester and later as M.L.C. for the North West Cape. Again he figured as a stormy petrel, holding the balance of power in an evenly-divided Upper House and bringing about the downfall of the Jameson Ministry.

Matjesfontein's most crowded months were during the South African War, when it was the headquarters of the Cape Command with twelve thousand troops camped round the village. The Coldstream Guards, Seventeenth Lancers, Middlesex Regiment, all came to

know Matjesfontein only too well. Down a side street in the former laundry a Major Douglas Haig presided over a small mess, and Mr. J.D. Logan was invited to a champagne party. Private Edgar Wallace of the R.A.M.C., unloaded medical stores on Matjesfontein railway platform. French, Ironside, Roberts all marched down that main street.

Logan built the present double-storeyed Hotel Milner in the early stages of the South African War. The turret was used as a look-out post, while the hotel became a military hospital. Always an individualist, Logan raised his own mounted corps for service in the field and equipped it at his own expense. He was twice wounded and mentioned in dispatches.

One landmark at Matjesfontein that every motorist knows is the granite monument to Major-General A.C. Wauchope in the private cemetery south of the village. Wauchope was killed at Magersfontein, but the body was reburied at Matjesfontein which was, as I have said, the military headquarters of the period. It

was the Black Watch regiment that put up the memorial, and Lady Wauchope visited the grave after the South African War. Wauchope's body was never taken back to Scotland, as some writers have stated.

Jimmy Logan had left Scotland, like thousands of other Scots, with only a few pounds in his pocket. After the South African War he returned on holiday, took over a castellated mansion with a baronial hall near his native village in Berwickshire, and became the benefactor of the poor and aged in the district. He still spent much of his time at his beloved Matjesfontein, however, and there he died in 1920. His son, Mr. James Douglas Logan, and his daughter, wife of Colonel H.J. Buist, stayed on at Matjesfontein. For many details of the career of the "Laird of Matjesfontein" I am indebted to them.

Some years ago, when the river at Laingsburg was in flood, I spent a night at the Hotel Milner at Matjesfontein with many other motorists. I saw there one of the most complete

collections of South African male and female big-game heads I had ever seen, and imagined that these, too, were one of the original Jimmy Logan's enterprises. Many travellers must have gazed in wonder at the array in the hotel dining-room. During a recent visit to Matjesfontein, however, I learnt that the present Mr. Logan was the collector. He started about thirty years ago. A firm of taxidermists in Pretoria supplied most of them, and farmers filled in the gaps. There you see magnificent specimens of the wildebeest and waterbuck, kudu, springbok, gemsbok, blesbok, tsessebe and hartebeest. Among the rare heads are those of the bontebok and nyala, and there are horns of the situtunga. Many East African animals are included. "I only shot one of them myself - the red deer from Scotland," Mr. Logan told me. "I was out shooting woodcock in Perthshire, and my gun was loaded with birdshot. Suddenly a stag broke cover. I let drive with one barrel, but it was like shooting against a brick wall. The next shot struck the back of the neck and the stag dropped dead. It caused a stir in the

district, as no red deer had been seen in that part of Perthshire for years. But that is the way the fine antlers of a monarch of the glen came to Matjesfontein."

Mr. Logan remembers the springbok migration of 1886 across a farm six miles to the west of Matjesfontein. The springbok still visit this area occasionally, and there is a small herd on Tweedside farm. Tweedside is leased as a sheep and wheat farm nowadays, but Colonel and Mrs. Buist retain the homestead and grow thousands of tulips.

Most people think of Matjesfontein as part of the karoo, though it is really on the fringe. The true karoo veld begins at Whitehill, a few miles to the north, where the Logan family gave the land for a succulent garden some years ago. This garden has been removed to Worcester, an unwise step in the view of some botanists.

Mr. Logan is no mean botanist himself. He has many varieties of succulents in his own garden next door to the hotel at Matjesfontein. Two

succulents which he discovered bear his name; and in company with another botanist he found the only yellow stapelia known to science. In a good year, he told me, the veld between Matjesfontein and Sutherland has a more gorgeous display of wildflowers than Namaqualand.

Matjesfontein takes its name from the rush called Matjiesgoed from which mats are made. Early last century a farmer named Coetzee and several of his relatives were murdered there by slaves, aided by Bushmen; and Coetzee's wife was carried off to the Bushman stronghold. She would have been murdered too, but the slaves spoke up on her behalf and she was held prisoner. Then the Bushmen heard that a commando was approaching. They were leading her to the place of execution when the commando under Veldkornet Nel arrived and saved her life. Nel recovered twentyfive thousand rixdollars in paper money from the Bushmen.

Lichtenstein visited Matjesfontein with Commissioner De Mist a few years later, and found John Strauss, son of a German soldier, farming there. He told them that his father had been among those who were murdered during the rising of the slaves.

Thus the settlement of Matjesfontein is at least one hundred and fifty years old. The railway reached it in 1878, and from Matjesfontein the old Gibson and Red Star Line coaches set out on the run of five or six days to Kimberley. Matjesfontein has never become the town which Colonel Schermbrucker mentioned in his optimistic speech long ago. It is a village of two hundred people with two schools, and its glorious days have departed. Yet I drove away feeling, as I have often felt before, that small places like Matjesfontein have much beneath the surface if you care to uncover it. I understood the fascination it had for old Jimmy Logan; who liked Matjesfontein better than his castle in Scotland; and for Olive Schreiner, who was drawn back there again and again at intervals of years.

Colonel Buist told me that when he saw the Great Karoo more than half a century ago he remarked to another officer that it seemed like a desert. The officer pointed to the bushes and declared that they made the finest grazing for sheep in the world. "Little did I think that I would settle here in 1921 after thirty years as an army surgeon," remarked Colonel Buist. "Yet it grows on you and you get to like it. I don't know why the time passes so fast, or what I have been doing, but I never have an idle day."

That must have been the way old Jimmy Logan felt about it, too. John X. Merriman once said: "I wish there were ten thousand Logans in South Africa." However, there was just that one determined individual, and so there is only one Matjesfontein.

CHAPTER 6

TOWNS OF THE GREAT KAROO

OLIVE SCHREINER once declared it would be impossible to build the old Dutch-Huguenot towns of the Western Province now, for they

were as unique as the mountains. Would she have said that about a karoo capital such as Beaufort West, I wonder? All you would need to reproduce the modern face of Beaufort West would be the corrugated iron, the petrolpumps and the juke-boxes.

In a drought, the blackened veld surrounding Beaufort West makes you shudder. Someone must have been thinking of the Sahara when he designed the aerodrome building like a Foreign Legion fort. Yet there is a moist and mellow old Beaufort West behind the cafes and garages. You have only to fly low over the long gardens with their windmills to realize that this national road town has never lost touch with the soil.

Beaufort West, with five thousand white people and eight thousand non-Europeans, is the largest town in the Great Karoo, centre of the leading sheep district. It was established by Lord Charles Somerset as a magisterial outpost in a lawless territory. Runaway slaves, cattle-raiders and other criminals passed that way as

they made for the no-man's-land beyond the Orange River. Smugglers carried powder and firearms to the natives. So in 1818 Lord Charles placed Lieut. John Baird there as landdrost to maintain law and order on the frontier.

The outpost was simply Beaufort in the beginning, in honour of Lord Charles Somerset's father, the Duke of Beaufort. (Years later it became Beaufort West to avoid confusion with Fort Beaufort and Port Beaufort.) Portions of districts as far away as Tulbagh and Graaff-Reinet were embodied in the fifteen thousand square miles of the new Beaufort district. The northern border was not defined, but Baird was expected to keep an eye on everything from the Orange River southwards to the Swartberg, from the Kariega river in the east to the Dwyka in the west.

Hooivlakte, the farm of Commandant Abraham de Klerk, was selected as the site for Beaufort village. The original title deeds referred to "Hooijvlakte geleegen in de Karoo"; and the

first owner, Godliep Rudolph Opperman, had received the farm in 1760 from Governor Tulbagh. It was a cattle post, one of the first in that area.

Commandant De Klerk sold this farm and the neighbouring Boesjesmansberg to the government for £1025. The old commandant, a remarkable character, had fought in several Kaffir wars, and he had killed thirty lions. Lichtenstein, who visited him, remarked that Hooivlakte was a model farm with eight thousand head of small stock, fields of corn and a large orchard. There was an abundance of peaches and grapes of the very best sorts. De Klerk also pressed wine and sent raisins to the Cape Town market.

Such was the village site a century and a half ago. Mary Moffat, wife of the missionary, rested at Beaufort in 1820 and wrote to her mother: "This is a newly-formed district where our missionary Taylor has accepted a church which, by the bye, is only a room in a farmhouse with two beds in it. There are only

about six houses in the place. Mr. Baird invited us to his house to eat, which we have done now for four days. He showed us a plan of the intended town. It is a fertile spot, bounded on one side by the Gamka and on the other by the Dry River."

When the Rev. Colin Fraser of Aberdeen settled at Beaufort as Dutch Reformed Church minister in 1825 he held his services at a poplar tree near the wall of the present dam. His church was a tent of wagon sails. The first real church was not finished until five years later. Fraser's parish stretched away into the littleknown wilderness to the north. There were no roads and no permanent farms. The farmers were trekboers, settling down along the rivers and wherever they could find water for their fat-tailed sheep, their cattle and their horses. Fraser visited them on horseback, accompanied by an elder and an *agterryer*, a groom leading a pack-horse which carried bedding, clothes, food and Communion plate. In this way members of the church were gathered together,

instructed and confirmed, and their children were baptized.

There were also a few white people who had been living beyond the civilized frontiers for so long that they had lost touch with religion and feared the arrival of the predikant. John Fraser (later to become Sir John Fraser), the minister's son, recalled that some remote farmers cleared out when they heard his father was coming. John Fraser once saw a whole family kneeling before his father's pulpit in the Beaufort church; grandfather and grandmother, father and mother and children of various ages; and all were being baptized. They were Krugers, and his father had restored them to Christendom. The grandparents had not seen a church since they had left the Western Province. The others had never seen a church.

Colin Fraser, during one of his journeys in the Nuweveld, was asleep one night under his *velkombers* (sheepskin blanket) when his elder called urgently: "Mister Fraser, don't move, listen ... a big snake has crept under our blanket and lies

across my body. Slip out quietly and call the boy. Get the snake sharply by the tail and jerk him off me and then we can kill it." The boy jerked the snake so far that when they searched it had vanished.

John Fraser told the story of his father's habit of going down to the river-bed to read his Bible. He sat in the bush on a mimosa stump and found it peaceful. The river at Beaufort is the Gamka, the old "lion river" of the Hottentots. One day the minister was sitting with his eyes closed when he felt a sudden weight on the Bible and looked up into the face of a lion. Fraser prayed. The lion then rushed away into the bush. Next moment Fraser was surrounded by Bushmen. They were carrying spears, bows and arrows, for they had been hunting the lion.

This clan of Bushmen had been living across the river, opposite Beaufort, when Fraser had first arrived there. He had tried to convert them and failed, as all missionaries have failed up to this day. Soon the Bushmen moved away, distrusting the white man, leaving a square, level altar,

blackened by fire and shining with fat, where they had offered up sacrifices.

When the naturalist Andrew Steedman visited Beaufort in 1830 there were two streets, Donkin and Bird Streets, about thirty houses and two hundred people. The church, he noted, was large enough to hold a thousand people and was filled when the farmers came into town. The bell could be heard at a great distance. Steedman mentioned two drawbacks to farming; long droughts and raids by Bushmen.

Shortly before Steedman's visit the district had been shocked by the murder of Louis Nel, a farmer, and his four children. The wife had also been left for dead, but she recovered and stated that the murderer was Reuter Calie, a native labourer. Two years later Calie was caught and sentenced to death. This was the first time that a scaffold had been set up in the village. The execution was carried out with an armed guard of farmers round the gallows.

The village watched an even more distressing scene in 1840. A young white man, Jan Lodewyk du Preez, had found two Hottentot children, a girl of eight and a boy of six, raiding his father's orchard. He fired on them, killing the girl and wounding the boy. For this crime he was sentenced to death and hanged in public.

Beaufort West has always been famous for its pear trees, and when they are in blossom along Donkin Street, the village rivals Pretoria in jacaranda time. As long ago as 1839 the Quaker traveller James Backhouse mentioned them. "Beaufort is a pretty little town of about six hundred inhabitants, watered by two copious springs, which give its gardens an extraordinary degree of fertility," he wrote. "The streets are bordered with mulberry, pear, melia and weeping-willow trees. No canteen exists, the magistrate having refused to grant licences. Large numbers of Boers have emigrated from the district to Natal, parting with their farms for a trifle."

When Bishop Gray paid his visit in 1848 he met a "Colonial lady" who told him that she had not seen an English church minister for thirty-eight years. He held a service in the Dutch Reformed Church and raised £200 for an English church. Land was cheap at that period. One farmer told Bishop Gray that he hired five thousand morgen of Crown land for £1 a year.

Nowadays one car passes through Beaufort West every minute, on an average, during those December week-ends when all the school-children in South Africa seem to be on the road. This is certainly a contrast with the scene a century ago, when the "Cape Mercury" declared: "For a dreary, down-on-your-luck retreat, try Beaufort West. Business is dead. The municipal chest is insolvent. There is no more talk of a town house."

Modern sheep farmers would smile at the wool cheques received by Beaufort West farmers in the middle of last century. Nevertheless, there

were wills of that time proved at from £40,000 to £60,000 - great wealth, a century ago.

I have found a record of seven artisans from England who reached Beaufort West in 1858. Within two days all of them had found work; the masons at eight shillings a day, and a baker at four pounds a month with board and lodging free.

Beaufort West's first gaol was not a success. The gaoler in 1861 was an American negro; and he left his post one night to attend a friend's wedding. Four coloured men broke out, burgled a store, selected the most expensive clothes and guns, stole horses and rode clear away over the border. The negro became a prisoner as a result of his neglect of duty; but he, too, escaped and was never seen again. Three years later the prisoners seized their old Hottentot guard, threw him into a pond, and departed. On this occasion, however, all but two were recaptured.

During a depression in the eighteen-eighties, milk was sold at a penny a bottle, honey at twopence a pound, and potatoes at half-a-crown a bag. A man who married on a salary of fifteen pounds a month was more comfortable than he would be to-day with four times that amount.

Beaufort West has long been in a position to boast of its healthy air and the great ages some inhabitants have reached. It might also enter a claim for large families. Mr. Willem Petrus Engelbrecht of Groendraai farm, who died in 1894 at the age of ninety-one, left thirteen sons, three daughters, eighty-six grandchildren, fifty-eight great grandchildren and eighteen great-great-grandchildren - a total of 178 direct descendants.

It was Beaufort West, of course, which sent the redoubtable Molteno, the "Lion of Beaufort West", later Sir John Charles Molteno, to the Old Cape House. Molteno came of a noble Italian family which had been rooted in England for

generations before he sailed for Cape Town in 1831 at the age of seventeen.

Young Molteno first worked in the Cape Public Library, then became a wine merchant. When the wine trade slumped he remembered a journey he had made to Beaufort West, and turned to wool. No roads had been built, the mountain ranges were still great barriers, the rivers were unbridged. It took Molteno twenty days by ox-wagon to reach the farms he had bought at Nelspoort. He had imported Saxon merino rams, however, and now he started merino farming in a district which had previously seen only the fat-tailed Hottentot sheep.

The last of the lions were moving off when Molteno arrived, but he still had to deal with the leopards that carried off thirty of his sheep in a night. There was no homestead on Nelspoort farm. Neighbours wondered whether the raw young Englishman could possibly make a success of sheep farming. Within a year Molteno had lost his wife and their young child. Yet he stayed on, living in a tent, facing all the hardships, the

loneliness and toil; and he managed his farm with great skill. Within five years he was so prosperous that he was able to hand over the farm routine to a manager and give some of his time to other affairs. Often he rode alone to Cape Town on horseback, a distance of 360 miles. Molteno became a great figure in Beaufort West affairs. He went to the Seventh Kaffir War with the burghers of his district, and returned as commandant. Molteno then settled in the village. He started a bank, which the people sorely needed. He supervised his farms covering nearly one hundred thousand acres. And he became the first prime minister of the first cabinet in the Cape Colony. The old Molteno estate at Nelspoort was subdivided and sold in 1944, but the name of the "Lion of Beaufort West" remains in Molteno village and the Molteno Pass over the Nuweveld mountains.

As a municipality, Beaufort West is older than Cape Town. It was in 1837 that this enterprising village took advantage of the ordinance permitting the election of councillors. Two weeks

after the first election, Beaufort West was flooded. The Gamka river came raging down, a little girl was drowned in the street and two houses were washed away. The next serious flood was in 1869, two years after the town dam had been completed. Leaks had been observed in the wall, and the bursting of the dam was anticipated. Everyone knew that rockets would be fired when the situation became really dangerous. At eleven one morning the rockets went up, church bells rang, and the whole population made for high ground. (I believe the only exception was an obstinate ouma who had a fine batch of bread in the oven and refused to leave it.) That flood cost Beaufort West £60,000, but there was no loss of life. Six houses were swept away.

Beaufort West was flooded again in 1941, and that was the most expensive flood of all. The people were asleep when the river burst its banks. Water surged into almost every house and shop. There were many rescues, and many of the injured went to hospital. Damage was

estimated at £100,000, but the most surprising part of the disaster was that a man delivering milk was the only victim to lose his life.

Many years ago a man murdered his wife in the river-bed near Beaufort West. Ever since then, the people say, a fiery will-o'-the-wisp, the dreaded oog, larger than the new moon, has been observed moving up and down the river. It is the spirit of the dead wife seeking revenge. You see it coming; and then, at the moment when a clash appears to be inevitable, it vanishes. Animals, especially horses, stand and sweat with fear when they see it. A daring transport-rider who drove straight towards the oog became a lunatic.

Another version of the legend describes the oog as the spirit of a mother seeking her daughter who had been drowned in the river. So many people have seen the oog that it must be accepted as a reality. Scientists think it is formed by inflammable gas exuded by the rotting plant life of the river bed. The oog is

observed more often in wet seasons than in times of drought.

In the town hall at Beaufort West you will find a collection of Napoleonic relics which must be envied by the great museums of the world. There is a silver salver bearing the coat-of-arms of the English East India Company. A silver wine-cooler, glass decanters with coats-of-arms and monograms, a dinner plate, a silver butterknife and two salt-cellars are among the articles of fine workmanship which Napoleon must have used almost every day. It was a queer chain of events that brought this beautiful tableware to Beaufort West.

Among the officers guarding Napoleon on St. Helena was a Colonel Henry Hugh Pritchard. When a member of Napoleon's staff reported in 1816 that the Emperor was short of cutlery and glass, Pritchard sent a number of articles from the East India Company's military mess to Longwood. Pritchard had a son Charles, born in 1815. Young Charles often called at Longwood and became one of a number of children who

went through their lives with the distinction of having sat on the Emperor's knee. After the death of Napoleon many articles from Longwood were sold, and Colonel Pritchard bought the tableware I have mentioned. These items passed to his son Charles.

Charles Pritchard went to school on St. Helena and then, in 1832, received a commission as an Ensign of infantry in the East India Company's service. He fell ill while on duty and was invalided out of the service on pension. Old soldiers never die, however, and Ensign Pritchard drew his pension for seventy-seven years! It was in the eighteen-thirties that he came to the Cape and settled at Beaufort West. There he took part in unicipal affairs and was later elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. One of his sons, William Auret Pritchard, was the Johannesburg surveyor after whom Pritchard Street was named. Another son, Benjamin, inherited the Napoleonic relics and left them to the Beaufort West municipality in memory of his father.

All the karoo towns have their memories of old dramas. Victoria West stands alone, however, as the scene of an unusual disaster more than eighty years ago, when it was flooded by a cloudburst and turned into a village of the dead.

No other event in Victoria West, before or since, can compare with that night of tragedy. There was a time, I know, when Mrs. H.J. Wernich was killed by lightning in the village. William Murray, an early magistrate, was murdered by Korannas while out on an official mission. More than once the houses have been shaken by earthquakes. It must have been a grim moment, too, when the murderer James Morris was carried to the scaffold outside the gaol and stood there with the rope round his neck calling to a woman in the crowd: "Maria, look me in the face. It is your fault I am here, but you will follow me soon."

For years, of course, Victoria West was a quiet village. It was laid out on the farm Zeekoegat,

between two hills, with a narrow poort to the west. There was a sale of erven in 1844, and each purchaser undertook to build a house within four years or pay a fine of fifty Rix-dollars to church funds. Moreover, every erf had to be planted with a border of quince or pomegranate or elder trees. With the erf went grazing rights for twenty trek-oxen, two milk cows, two horses, and a flock of sheep or goats. And no one was allowed to sell wine or brandy.

One of the early ministers was the Rev. H.C.V. Leibbrandt. He raised money for the first church organ, and worked hard; but his liberal outlook caused a split in the congregation and he was offered £2,500 to resign. Leibbrandt later became the Cape archivist and historian.

Many thousands of air travellers have read the name Victoria West on the mountain to the north of the town. James Easton, a storekeeper, and his son made a hobby of placing the stones that form this huge sign into position. They worked secretly for weeks. Then one morning Victoria West awoke to find that the stones had

been white-washed during the night, so that all could read: "J. Easton – General Dealer - Victoria West." Other shopkeepers were less enthusiastic over this little enterprise than the Eastons. The matter came before the town council, and the complainants declared that it was monstrous that a mountain should become an advertisement for one man. The council ruled that only the name Victoria West could be allowed to remain. Nowadays the council provides the whitewash. James Easton died in 1948, at the age of ninety-two.

Nearly a thousand people of all races were living in Victoria West on the night of February 27, 1871 - the night of the flood. Among the large buildings were the Dutch Reformed Church, the new library hall, Quirk's Hotel and the gaol. There were a few shops and about sixty private houses. Before darkness fell that night the bed of the Brak River, which runs through the village, was dry. It had been a sweltering day, but with the twilight came a cold breeze and thunder

clouds. Lightning flashed on the whitewashed cottages, but no rain fell in the village.

As a prelude to a thunderstorm, air currents rush violently upwards and prevent the condensing raindrops falling to the ground. Thus you have masses of water suspended over small areas. If the storm passes over a mountain the uprush of air is broken and the gullies are filled suddenly with torrents of water. Such is the mechanism of a cloud-burst.

Only one man saw the cloud-burst on the mountain slopes ten miles to the south-west of Victoria West that night. He was a farmer visiting his goat-kraals; and he realized immediately that many lives would be in danger as the flood raced along the Brak River. He made for the nearest farm, Patrysfontein, where the Hugo family lived, six miles from the village.

Patrysfontein homestead was in ruins when he reached it. Frans Hugo told him that he had been sitting round the kitchen table with his

wife and five children when they heard the roaring of the water. The kitchen door was torn away by the flood. All of them made for the open air and became separated in the darkness by the swift flood. Hugo had the presence of mind to struggle towards the heavy farm wagon on higher ground. The wagon was in danger of being carried away by the force of water, but he clamped down the brakes and it remained like an island. He saw a small form sweeping past, and rescued one of his sons. They were the only survivors. Miles away downstream the bodies of the mother and the four other children were found next day. A coloured shepherd and his wife were also drowned on Patrysfontein. The house and furniture were wrecked and the farm ruined. When the water struck the village, Rainie Dodds, the belle of Victoria West, was trying on her wedding dress. The house collapsed, her spine was injured by falling bricks, and very soon she died.

They were dancing at Quirk's Hotel that night. It was close to the river bed, far too close. Of twenty-two people at the party, one escaped.

A wave five feet high raced through the main street, playing havoc with the raw-brick cottages. Many were drowned in their beds or killed as the walls fell in. One side of the main street was higher than the other. Mr. Ferguson, who had a house and shop with a high stoep, was reading a newspaper in his bedroom when his wife heard screams outside. She went out, but ran back crying out: "We shall all be drowned." Ferguson hurried into the shop, lit all the lamps in the window, and opened the shutters so that people might find refuge on his stoep.

People on the lower side called to Ferguson to throw a rope across. With the aid of this rope Mrs. Dodds and six people from her house reached safety, leaving the body of poor Rainie to the flood. Then Mr. and Mrs. Laws and three men followed them and saved their lives with the rope.



"It was the wool boom which created many villages. People were pouring into the karoo, little knowing that their descendants would be abandoning it for the cities a century later." (*Chapter Six.*)

Hundreds of bales of wool floated down the street. The lights in Ferguson's window revealed doors and roofs, sheep, goats, mules and horses drifting past the houses. One old woman was buffeted about amid the flotsam with her child until she lost consciousness. She drifted to a cartwheel embedded in the ground, and one of her legs was broken between the spokes. Yet she held on until she was saved.

Mrs. Jacobsohn made a raft of a featherbed and placed her young children on it. They floated safely until the waters subsided. Mrs. Kossuth was trapped in her living-room with the walls caving in round her. She stood in the fireplace to avoid injury. When the water rose to her chin she held her child of six over her head. For three hours she stood there, until she was rescued.

A young Hottentot girl was washed out of her cottage at one end of the village. She swam with the current until she was washed into a tree at the far end.

John McDonald the butcher and his wife had just undressed when the flood reached them. They saved their lives by climbing the willow-tree at their front door; and there they were found naked, after they had been shouting for a long time.

One aged couple clung to their doomed house until a relative remembered them. All he could do was to make them as comfortable as possible on a table under a tree, telling them to hang on to the branches if the water rose.

Johannes Buyskes, driver of the mail coach, was one of the flood heroes. It was raining so heavily as he approached Victoria West that night that he could not see his mule team. It was impossible to drive into the village, for the road had been washed away. Buyskes outspanned, and then went forward alone, feeling his way with a staff. He rescued so many people that a number of Victoria West women later presented him with a long, plaited chain of their hair as a thankoffering.

In the narrow poort the water remained at a high level until shortly before dawn. When daylight came, however, it was possible to enter every house. All the carts in the village were sent to the river bank to salvage goods swept away during the night. Each cart returned with the bodies of the drowned. One young man, Hugh Macdonald, strained his heart severely during the rescue work and died three years later.

Daybreak revealed the full horror of the disaster. The "Beaufort West Courier" described Victoria West as "a pretty town in ruins, with tales of woe and adventure everywhere." The "Cape Argus" reported: "In all directions dead people, sheep, cattle, horses, as also merchandise could be seen lying about. Many of the corpses were naked."

Just below the village was Mr. A.L. Devenish's farm. Here stood the finest farm dam ever built in the colony, with a solid stone wall backing the embankment. When Devenish counted his losses he found that five of his shepherds had

been drowned, with sixteen hundred merino sheep. His dam had been completely destroyed. In the village, thirty houses had collapsed. The magistrate's court was badly damaged and all public documents lost.

To this day the death-roll has never been compiled with complete accuracy. Coloured people were swept down the river and lost without trace. Sixty bodies were carried to the library hall, however, where relatives in the village or from the farms identified them.

"The library hall, the only undamaged public building, was converted into a mortuary," wrote a survivor. "Bearer party after bearer party entered. The superintendent of police sent many weary searchers away to wander afresh; others he led into the darkened room behind. Among the dead was the body of a woman whose cottage above the poort was among the first to be swept away. The force of the onrush carried her and her children right through the poort and laid them against the churchyard wall at the end of the town, as

though bringing them to a resting-place. There were no marks or scratches of any kind on the bodies, yet they had passed over jagged rocks. Others were so cut that they could be identified only by their clothes. A gloom like the shadow of a great pall lay upon the town. People in the streets spoke in whispers."

A few letters describing the disaster have been carefully preserved. I saw one, written by a woman to a friend in Beaufort West, which conveys the atmosphere of that day of tragedy. "Oh, we are in such distress," she wrote. "We have had an awful flood and we were nearly killed. Oh! you don't know the misery. The dead carts are going backwards and forwards. They are unable to make coffins for the coloured people, but buried them all in large graves. The shrieks for help were awful and never to be forgotten. Uncle Dan was very ill that night, yet he was up the whole night trying to save people. He saved us all. We were all standing on the stoep above our knees in water, every moment expecting the house to fall on

us. It was so dark that no one could stretch out a hand to help. Four of Uncle Anthony's shepherds have gone and ever so many sheep."

The Kerkraad met and decided to bury a number of victims in one grave, with separate burials for those whose relatives wished it. Most of the farmers near the village had heard of the disaster. At ten in the morning on March the first the church was filled and three ministers conducted the funeral service. Ox-wagons served as hearses. The rows of rough coffins were placed in the graveyard and the funeral hymn was sung.

"Church and other bells were tolling," wrote one of the congregation. "Husbands mourned for wives and wives for husbands. Then all returned to the task of rendering assistance, for the poorer classes only had blankets wrapped round them."

A breakwater wall was built a year later where the river passed through the village. Victoria

West has been flooded again since the 1871 disaster, but never with loss of life.

Probably the last flood survivor was a coloured centenarian woman who was living in the location a few years ago. To-day you have to go to the graveyard to find reminders of the tragedy - the granite monument and inscriptions on some of the tombstones. The flood is no longer within living memory.

"No such calamity has happened in South Africa within the memory of man," summed up the "Cape Argus" at the time. "The great Knysna fire and the bursting of the Beaufort dam sink into insignificance beside it."

Middelburg gained its name because it grew up in the middle of the surrounding villages of Richmond, Cradock, Colesberg, Graaff-Reinet and Burgersdorp. Those were the days when karoo distances were reckoned in terms of hours on horseback, and you could reach

several of the places I have mentioned from Middelburg in just ten hours.

Governor van Plettenberg, returning from the northern border in the seventeen-seventies, crossed the present Middelburg district. He named a conspicuous peak Compassberg because the whole countryside could be seen from the summit. It was a dangerous area on account of the Bushmen; yet one farm was given out as far back as 1780- a farm with a romantic story.

This was Schoombiesklip, and the farmer was Andries Godliep Schoonbee. (Some careless clerk got the name wrong.) Schoonbee was a Dane who had thrown his brother out of a window in Denmark and left the country in a hurry, thinking he had killed him. (In fact, his brother survived.) Not long after his arrival, Schoonbee cut these words in a rock on his farm: "Anno 1780 April ik ben die plaas heeft aangeleygt A.G.S.B. vyt Denemark - sprengane als sant."

Locusts, the migrating springbok and severe droughts made all the early settlers wonder why they had come to this far district. Stockenstrom, who was there in 1827, reported: "I found the country everywhere in a most frightful state from the locusts, which may be said to form almost one swarm all over the district, nor is the drought less disturbing." Most of the farmers trekked across the Orange River in despair.

It was not until 1852 that a meeting was held to select a church centre. This was a time when new villages drew to them white ne'er-do-wells who pretended to be craftsmen, but who divided their time between bad workmanship and orgies round the brandy wagons. The evils of the coloured locations that marred this period were largely due to these low whites. Middelburg had a bad reputation in this respect. The farmers came in for Nagmaal, and to sell their produce; but at other times they avoided the village. Thus two decades passed

before Middelburg began to take shape as the pleasant town of to-day.

Murraysburg is about the same age as Middelburg, but it grew much faster. In 1858 the "Cape Argus" reported: "What six months ago was a dreary desert half way between Graaff-Reinet and Beaufort West now has seventy houses built or building and three hundred inhabitants. Orchards are springing up." The village was named after Dr. Andrew Murray, six times Moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church, author of more than two hundred books and pamphlets.

Another karoo town founded in the eighteen-fifties was Hanover. It is now the half-way house between Cape Town and Johannesburg, favourite night-stop for motorists who like to cover no more than five hundred miles a day. The town was laid out on the farm Petrus Vallei, owned by a German named Gous, born in Hanover.

It was the wool boom, of course, which created so many villages during that period. People were pouring into the karoo, little knowing that their descendants would be abandoning it for the cities a century later. In the ox-wagon days a karoo dweller who visited another town was often expected to give some account of his travels when he returned. Thus the "Graaff-Reinet Advertiser", in September 1866 announced: "Mr. Smit has just returned from Hanover and informs us that the houses are well furnished there, but that the church is the worst attempt he has seen in the country. The Hanoverians have very strict town regulations. No stranger who buys cattle or horses is allowed to stay longer than one day, otherwise he must buy a permit or have his stock impounded."

Colesberg is older than most of its neighbours, for there was a station of the London Missionary Society there very early last century. It had an earlier name which is a little hazy. Some say it was Toverberg, the

"bewitched mountain", because the mountain there seemed to recede as the pioneer Afrikaner hunters approached it. Others prefer the Toornberg version, "mountain of wrath", though I can find nothing to explain this origin. Sir Lowry Cole changed the name to Colesberg, and issued an order forbidding the use of the old name under penalty of a heavy fine. That is one way of ensuring that one's name remains on the map.

The missionaries collected a number of Bushman families at this site. Landdrost Stockenström closed the station, as he did not wish to have so many savages close to the colonial frontier. Gun-runners often passed that way after the missionaries had departed. Mr. Ryneveld, the Graaff-Reinet commissioner, captured a wagon there loaded with gunpowder, lead and new guns. It was in charge of four Bastards of the Barend Barendse clan.

A village was formed in 1830, when the first Andrew Murray preached there, and the

foundation stone of the church was laid. Andrew Steedman, the Cape Town merchant, zoologist and author, was present at this gathering. If he had arrived a week earlier he might have passed within a mile or two of the place without knowing that a village was about to be founded there. Now at dusk he came upon hundreds of tents and wagons scattered all over the veld, fires blazing for the evening meal, whips cracking as more families drove up. As soon as the ceremony of laying the stone was over, the Graaff-Reinet traders brought out their goods. Steedman wrote: "It was like an English fair without the theatrical booths and the demoralising scenes of riot or drunkenness such as frequently disgrace similar assemblages overseas."

The church was opened two years later. Storekeepers from Graaff-Reinet put up stalls in the main street, but the atmosphere was grim owing to rumours of a Koranna raid. Once the men were called to arms. Fortunately the raiders turned out to be a herd of wildebees.

Casalis, Arbousset and other French pastors spent a few days in Colesberg three years later. They found an embryonic town. Round the church lived a German shopkeeper, a doctor, a carpenter from the Cape and a Swiss watchmaker. The traveller Backhouse arrived in 1839 and attended a temperance meeting. Colesberg was a frontier town and far from temperate, he declared. Half the population was English. Mechanics were earning from, four to six shillings a day and spending a large part of it on strong drink.

Colesberg residents protested when the circuit court stopped at Graaff-Reinet. Witnesses were dragged from their families and had to ride two hundred miles, a special hardship in times of horse sickness.

Other events shocked Colesberg at this period. A Hottentot wagon-driver was struck by lightning, the fourth fatality of this kind in three months. A dense swarm of locusts took four hours to pass the village. And three thousand panes of glass were broken in a hailstorm.

"Many years ago a man murdered his wife in the river-bed near Beaufort West. Ever since then, the people say, a fiery will-o'-the-wisp, the dreaded *oog*, has been observed moving up and down the river. Animals, especially horses, sweat with fear when they see it."
(Chapter Six.)



Colesberg had grown to a village of two thousand people in 1859, and one traveller described them as "very enterprising men of manners and education". Their member in the Old Cape House was the Hon. Henry Tucker, who set up a record by riding his little roan *skimmel* from Colesberg to Cape Town, five hundred miles, in less than six days. On another occasion Tucker drove a post-cart over the same route in one hundred and fifteen hours. Colesberg lost many residents during the rush to the diamond fields, but it was visited by many dubious characters and deluged by other fortune seekers. Not long afterwards (in 1886) the "Cape Argus" correspondent reported: "Colesberg is in an awful state. There is no business, and about half the population is leaving. The sky is of brass and the earth is of lead. Horses have no value." In later years, of course, Colesberg became famous for horses and one breeder was reputed to have made a cool million pounds.

An event of the nineties which some of the oldest residents must remember was the balloon ascent and parachute jump by Harry Goodall, air pioneer.

One of Colesberg's great claims to fame lies in the fact that President Kruger spent his boyhood years on the farm Vaalbank in the district. That is not in doubt. A further claim has still to be proved; namely, that Kruger was born at Vaalbank. It seems that part of the huge Colesberg commonage was known as Vaalbank. When the Kruger funeral cortege passed through Colesberg in 1904 old people pointed to a certain house and remarked: "To think that he was born in old Venter's house."

Another anecdote refers to an incident on President Kruger's birthday in 1896, when a Mr. H.D. Wentworth was present at the celebrations.

"And young man, what part do you come from?" Kruger asked Wentworth.

"From Colesberg, President."

"Yes, Colesberg has produced some good material," remarked Kruger jocularly. "I was born in Colesberg."

Then there was the evidence of Mr. Ludwig Kamfer, aged ninety-eight in 1953, who spoke of Kruger's visit to Colesberg in the nineties to meet

Sir Henry Lock. Kruger remarked to Dr. Knobel, his personal surgeon: "But you were also born here. I will show you our common birthplace."

Steynsrust, in the Free State, disputes this claim fiercely. Many historians have tried to solve the mystery of Kruger's birthplace, but no clear proof has been discovered. I like to think that such a strong personality as Kruger was in fact a son of the hard old karoo at Colesberg.

Richmond, another karoo town that every national road motorist knows, stands on the highest steppe of the Cape Province. You can freeze in winter at five thousand feet. Richmond feels every wind that blows. It has survived snowstorms and mild earthquakes, a flood that swept into the houses, drought and hail.

It was in 1844 that the first erven were sold. Four years later a visitor from Port Elizabeth wrote: "The karoo lies on all sides. The stores are substantial. There are few gardens owing to the water supply not being too strong. Many

houses belong to farmers and are shut up during weekdays. There is neither teacher nor magistrate." Later that year the village was illuminated in honour of the magistrate's arrival.

The gunpowder magazine blew up just over a century ago, but no one was hurt. Then there was the whirlwind at Rhenosterfontein which destroyed the outhouses, killed many sheep, lifted a Hottentot shepherd off the ground and carried him for a hundred yards. He was not seriously hurt.

Many little episodes in the life of Richmond would have been lost for ever if the village had not supported local newspapers from time to time. Thus I know that in 1865 an "ill-used swain" sued a young woman for breach of promise. It was settled out of court, the swain receiving £400 and costs. He would be lucky to touch that amount today. There must have been more in it than met the eye.

At this period the Richmond newspaper complained that it was impossible to rent a decent dwelling house. Yet there were twenty vacant houses in Main Street alone, all belonging to farmers who were too wealthy or independent to let them. As a result, they were occupied once a month or once a quarter. Owing to the water shortage, vegetables were a luxury. Meat cost sixpence a pound, while coffee was £12 a bag. "Richmond is not a poor man's paradise," summed up the writer. Some time later the newspaper reported that the village was becoming unpleasantly lively, and promised to rival Humansdorp in "anger, malice and all uncharitableness."

A sign of progress in 1880 was a public subscription for a hearse. In that year, too, the whole town gathered to watch the tarring, feathering and burning of an effigy of their M.L.A., Mr. Powell, who had not voted according to their wishes on the railway question.

One hundred burghers returned from the Basuto War during the following year. Richmond's municipal council debated for hours before voting £5 for the entertainment of the burghers, and then only on the strict understanding that nothing stronger than ginger-beer should be offered to the men.

Some towns in the karoo may be regarded as twins or triplets. Others are clearly individuals, with personalities which have grown out of their own people and the episodes of the years. All have something in common, a strong family resemblance outwardly and an inward sympathy. Their main streets have shared the same experiences and watched the same historic cavalcades in peace and war. They heard the rumble of wheels and crack of whip as the ex-wagons departed; northbound to adventure or southbound for the yearly trek to the sea.

They still share many, familiar scenes ... black suits of *ouderlinge* and *diakens* in the Sunday walk to church ... sheep in market

square ... above all, the streams of *dorpe-naars* seeking relief in the streets at night from the heat. Every karoo town lives again in summer when night falls, and then indeed you understand why this is the land of the stoep.

CHAPTER 7

MIDSUMMER IN GRAAFF-REINET

*Spandau's Peak that sunsets burn
And the dove-clouds dally on,
Fashioned like a haughty stern
Of a Spanish galleon,
Rock-browed Spandau gazes down
On a chess-board featured town,
Where in clean-cut squares are seen
Houses white and gardens green.*

-Francis Carey Slater

IT was midsummer when a burning and unreasonable desire came over me to make the acquaintance of Graaff-Reinet without further delay. No one would ride with me into the Great Karoo on the day after Christmas. Alone I said good-bye to the gulls on the edge of

Table Bay and drove northwards on the national road in heat that surpassed my desire.

As I raced wistfully past the Durbanville turning I thought of the friends who would be in the farm swimming-bath later that day, among the fruit, trees and vines. They would be eating cold turkey and salad in the shade, while for me there would be the blazing road ... karoo, karoo, karoo. But the road itself was an old drug that had lulled me through the years, and when I came out of the mist into the sun on the far side of Du Toit's Kloof, all self-pity had vanished.

An old man baboon lolloped across the road ahead; and because I had just come back to the Cape from a far island, I hailed that baboon as a friend. One night on that island I looked at the label on a bottle my host offered me and remarked: "I know the farm where they make that wine." Now, beyond Worcester, I passed the vineyard which had sent that wine across the ocean. Then over the Hex I roared, into the waves of heat, towards the karoo ocean. I

observed that Constable - the railway station that always puzzled me as a small boy interested in place-names - had become Konstabel. (The change was made purely for the sake of historical accuracy, when someone pointed out that the old Hottentot who lived there beside the *fontein* a century and a half ago was a certain Konstabel, not Constable.) Another little station, I remember, framed itself in my windscreen as a scene for a painter - green peppercorns, red roofs, a goods train sending its black smoke into the blue, and brown earth surrounding the karoo station.

You must love the karoo to live there. I thought of those people, reared in softer climates, who found life on the lonely karoo farms intolerable. At one time a few of the wealthier farmers sent to England for governesses. Some of these girls, sensitive and educated, were able to reconcile themselves to the sudden change until at last they lived happily in the karoo. Others, in spite of every human kindness, never took root in the hard

brown karoo world. They were exiles, suffering the pangs of exile, blind to the country that inspired Olive Schreiner's masterpieces. Yes, you must love the karoo if you are to dwell under the corrugated iron of those farmhouses that you see from the road ... or those distant ones you do not see, beyond the koppies, at the end of their own winding tracks.

Such were my reflections as I passed the tall stone needle set up as a signpost between Laingsburg and Prince Albert Road. Farther north there was a koppie with a grave on the summit. In the old days, I suppose, I might have sauntered up there to read the headstone and then walked after the wagon. And such is the curse of speed that I simply drove on, wondering whether a karoo patriarch lay there; possibly a man who knew all the moods of the karoo; one who might have guided my pen if only I had known him. Thus I came thankfully to Beaufort West, a town where motorists from all over Southern Africa, men in shorts and

women in yellow shirts and red slacks, mingled on that Sunday evening with the black-coated people on their way to church. You would not have seen that contrast in the old days.

There is a road that takes you through the heart of the Great Karoo, the stretch of nearly a hundred miles from Beaufort West to Aberdeen, a long run without a village. I should have lingered in Aberdeen, for I am sure I would have met friendly people and heard many tales of the century-old village. I glanced at Aberdeen's church tower, which the Aberdeen people claim as the highest in the country, visible across the flat karoo for twenty-five miles. (Noorder-Paarl, I believe, has a slightly taller spire.) Then I fixed my eyes ahead again, for I was weary of these shadeless plains and I knew that the Camdeboo mountains, Graaff-Reinet and the Sneeuberg lay to the north.

Graaff-Reinet is almost ringed in by mountains and a great loop of the Sundays River. When

you look down on Graaff-Reinet from the heights it is a rich green oval with the longest street a mile in length. I think of it as an emerald in a brown setting. Early travellers formed the same impression, for they called the place "gem of the desert" or "gem of the karoo". Graaff-Reinet is a very distinct personality, different in many ways from other karoo towns.

My hotel, old-fashioned but comfortable, with the stoep shaded by an hibiscus hedge, was once the Drostdy, the seat of government. As I drew up at the steps a "Christmas band" of native musicians and dancers was entertaining the residents, the only band I have ever heard composed of drums and police whistles. Then I went to my bedroom to slake a karoo thirst, with the *rum-tum peep-peep* resounding in my ears.

I have only one grievance against Graaff-Reinet, and you may as well hear it at once. Resting on my hotel bed with a glass of water beside me, I found persistent visions of war in

the Western Desert rising before my tired eyes. Was it the heat that brought memories of the shattered villas of Tobruk? Or the dust that made me think of the dusty road up from Sollum to Bardia? As I reached for the water again I traced the disturbance. It was the water, the chlorinated water of Graaff-Reinet. You cannot have a desert war without chlorine, but I did not expect to encounter it again in this peaceful karoo town. My winetaster's palate and my imagination had been disturbed. Fortunately I had Cape Town water in my flasks, and I was able to banish the unwelcome flavour and the visions.

Graaff-Reinet hospitality, I may add, does not take the form of chlorinated water. Years ago the great local drink, the traditional stimulant made in the town, was *withond*, a colourless dop brandy which held its own valiantly against any *witblits* made in other districts. For a quarter of a century it has been illegal to distil *withond*.

In the gracious homes of Graaff-Reinet I asked my hosts whether there was still any food or drink which belonged essentially to the town. Someone found me a bottle of the old sweet red muscadell, a wine to remember now that it is no longer made. Another resident suggested that prickly-pear syrup might have originated in the district. You boil down the prickly-pears to a dark brown liquid like treacle, and it is sweet enough without the addition of sugar. But this, too, is a lost delicacy since the pricklypear has been eradicated.

When I set out to discover the secret of Graaff-Reinet's personality I knew it would not be easy. On the surface, of course, there are the small-holdings, the irrigated *erwe* in the so-called "back streets" such as Donkin and Plasket Streets to the west of the town. Whole families still earn their livings in these pleasant vineyards and market gardens; one or two morgen apiece, flooded by day and again by night from the open furrows that run down the streets. You do not find

intensive cultivation on that scale in many other karoo towns.

Old Mr. Izak Muller, who had worked all his life on his small, beloved stretch of soil, told me that the Graaff-Reinet gardens were vanishing. There was a demand for building sites, and a man who was offered £250 for a slice of his garden weighed it up against carrots at a halfpenny a bunch - and sold.

"When I was a boy the water furrows were much wider and deeper," Muller recalled. "I swam in them. I grew up among the peach trees, and my earliest memory is of climbing and shaking the trees on the day when the peaches were gathered for drying. We ate mutton three times a day when I was a child - great dishes of mutton with stewed dried peaches. Some of the erf-holders went in for ostriches at the time of the boom, for no one made a fortune out of market gardening. Then there was a flood, and many ostriches in the river-bed were swept away. That was a disaster when a good breeding pair cost a couple of hundred pounds."

I asked Muller for the clue to Graaff-Reinet's character. He said it was in the karoo soil. All the fruit tasted better; everything had more flavour than the Western Province fruit. The crystal grapes of Graaff-Reinet, the hanepoot and Barbarossa were the finest in the land. They made konfyt there, green fig and watermelon and whole peach, such as no other town in South Africa could produce. Hedges yielded the most delicious quinces and pomegranates. In the old days the streets were lined with orange and lemon trees, and superb oranges (juicier than Clanwilliam and Transvaal oranges) still grew in the gardens.

Muller declared that even now the trees along the pavements enhanced the charm of the town. There was the kaffirboom with its red flower in spring; a few Camdeboo stinkwood trees; and many old cypresses, pines, gums, a few oaks and the pear trees which bore incomparable pears. I thought that Muller was too enthusiastic; but then I found his opinion confirmed by Scully (assistant magistrate of Graaff-Reinet in the eighteen-seventies), a man I have always recognised as an

authority. Scully went further than Muller and stated that the Graaff-Reinet grapes were, for eating purposes, the best in the world. He thought it was due to a combination of intense heat, rich soil and irrigation water. Scully drank so many tankards of foaming new wine one day that he passed out in Miss Leisching's dining-room. However, he placed it on record that he awoke delightfully refreshed.

Muller talked to me about the almost forgotten specialities known as Graaff-Reinetskoene and Graaffreinetters. The shoes, of the *velskoen* type, were of a bright yellow leather, the upper being sewn to the sole with *riempies*. Graaffreinetters were pipes, made by a resident named Jan Koning from red karee wood. The stem was six inches long, and Koning's pipes were always in great demand. Then there were the Graaff-Reinet dolls which were famous all over Southern Africa during World War I and for several years afterwards. They were created

by the late Mr. J.H. (Oom Jurie) Laubscher,³ a great character - first a transport rider, then a market gardener, antique collector, narrator of karoo tales, and a man who had the reputation of being able to make anything. Oom Jurie's daughters told me the story of the doll factory.

It was a rainy day, and the whole Laubscher family were sitting in one room when a neighbour and her little girl paid them a visit. The girl had an American doll which everyone admired. Dolls had disappeared from the shops owing to the war, and Oom Jurie gazed hard at this doll with the movable arms and legs. "I could make one as good as that," he announced finally. The family jeered at him. Oom Jurie then started work; his wife made the clothes, one of his daughters painted the face; and Oom Jurie riveted the arms and legs so that they

³ Mr. Laubscher died in 1952 at the age of eighty-six.

moved just as naturally as those of the American model.

Graaff-Reinet went mad over that doll, and every little girl wanted one. Oom Jurie and his family set out to supply the demand. Before very long they had to open a factory, and at the height of the boom they were employing seventy people. An old cripple sat and filled the bodies with granulated cork. Small boys, earning money out of school hours, dipped the dolls into the dye. It was a happy factory, and the Graaff-Reinet dolls went out to every corner of the Union and Southern Rhodesia. Post-war wage legislation killed the enterprise, but Oom Jurie's daughters still meet old employees in the street and chat about those great days in the doll factory. There is an Afrikaans book for children, "Riena Reinet", which tells the story of the Graaff-Reinet dolls in pictures.

The queer hobby of a Graaff-Reinet man, the late Mr. J.F. Joubert, has taken many thousands of visitors to a house in Bourke

Street. There I saw the porcupine quill house made in 1890 by Joubert. I cannot imagine what possessed Joubert when he set out to build a four-storied house (including attics and cellars) out of quills and using a cut-throat razor as his only tool. But others fell under the spell, the farmers of the district, and they trapped porcupines as fast as Joubert used up the quills. Within a year the handsome porcupine mansion was complete; possibly the only miniature house in the world composed of this odd material.

After the death of Joubert in 1907 his handiwork was exhibited to the public and everyone who came to Graaff-Reinet stood enthralled before the quill house with its fifty-two windows, balconies, garden and yard. The masterpiece stands in a glass case four feet square on a revolving table. Visitors did not start signing their names until 1927, and at the end of 1954 I left my name opposite number 7,627. Joubert also copied his wife's wardrobe in quills, the medium he had made peculiarly

his own. While on trek as a transport rider he filled an album with neat geometrical designs, and this also is on view. I came away marvelling not only at the industry of this eccentric, bygone craftsman, but also at the fascination of the miniature, the unusual spectacle, which has drawn such hordes of people to the Bourke Street house since Joubert died nearly half a century ago.

They told me in Graaff-Reinet that almost every home was a treasure-house of the past, a place of wonder for all who love antique furniture. This is true, and you come very close to the personality of the town in such mansions as the Te Water Huis, ancestral home of the Te Water family. Even more remarkable than the house was the owner, Mrs. Keegan (formerly a Miss Jacie te Water), a lady of eighty-six who blended vivacious charm with wisdom. Mrs. Keegan opened the family Bible which came from Holland with her ancestors, the first entry dated 1824; and she also produced a snapshot of the first motor-car owned by her late

husband, an Irish doctor, in 1904. She drove that car, and she was still driving cars when I met her fifty years later.

I have seen many fine old houses in company with more or less famous people, but the privilege of walking round the Te Water Huis with Mrs. Keegan was one I shall always value. "This is a house of memories ... only memories now," she said, but with such philosophy that there was hardly a trace of sadness in her voice. She pointed to an oil painting of her ancestors; not a formal group, but a cheerful scene in a living-room; and she told me the story of one of the girls in the picture.

The girl went to a religious meeting in Graaff-Reinet. Her conscience was aroused to such an extent by the revivalist that she came home, threw her ball dresses in a corner, stamped on them and vowed that never again would she give herself up to pleasure. Far away in the Free State a young predikant heard of the vow, and wrote a proposal of marriage.

"Onbekend maakt onbemind," replied this spirited girl. "Unknown is unloved."

"That is a fault that can be easily remedied," wrote back the predikant. He drove into Graaff-Reinet with a smart springwagon and spanking horses; and when he departed his bride went with him.

Mrs. Keegan led the way from one high reception room to another. I studied the rich wallpaper, glass chandeliers, grandfather and cuckoo clocks, the plush, inlaid chairs used by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth when they visited Graaff-Reinet; chairs that were saved from a Table Bay wreck when a lovesick master mariner sailed too close inshore in the hope of waving to a Mouille Point girl nearly a hundred years ago. I saw the yellowwood floors, the stone-flagged kitchen and pantries, old copper kettles. I met the servants whose grandparents had worked in the same house and made up the same canopied four-poster beds. I saw a fifteenth century black iron money chest, with a hidden keyhole on top.

That is where Mrs. Keegan keeps her old papers.

Hundreds of birds come to be fed every morning in the Te Water Huis garden, Cape canaries, lemoenduifies, finks, all feeding round the sundial. In this garden are some of the oldest vines in the town, Catawba and acorn grapes; here, too, are very old walnut and pear trees, and a geranium from a slip taken at Buckingham Palace. Sir Andries Stockenstroom knew this house, but I think the hawthorn, rosemary and pomegranate trees were planted after his time.

Wine cellars were usually built at surface level in the Cape, but this house has a cellar below the ground. This was once a wine estate with huge vineyards. You can still catch the aroma of wine in the cellar, and the large vats are still there. "We exchanged wine with relations in Constantia, " recalled Mrs. Keegan. "Everything in the Cape is bound together."

Pride of Graaff-Reinet in the public sense is Reinet Huis, once the Murray pastorie and now a national monument and museum. Here again I was more than fortunate in my guide, for Miss Isabel Lawrie is a grand-daughter of the Rev. Charles Murray, and her mother grew up in the house.

I believe the foundations of Reinet Huis were laid in 1808, and the spacious, gabled manse was completed about eight years later. Reinet Huis is more like a house in Old Cape Town than a karoo dwelling. To-day it is the only thatched house in a town which once knew nothing but thatch.⁴ You walk up stone steps to

⁴ When the Haarhoff home on Market Square was demolished in 1954, an old thatched roof was found under the iron roof. Many old documents, going back to 1812, were discovered in the thatch. The Haarhoffs came originally from Denmark and settled in Graaff-Reinet early last century.

the stoep with its original iron railings and enter the klein voorhuis (hall) with the *groot voorhuis*, used as a dining-room, straight ahead of you. Doors lead to the drawing-room, a smaller dining-room and many bedrooms. But this hospitable pastorie housed so many people at times - large families and guests - that some of the cellar rooms were used as bedrooms by the Murray sons. Front and back stoeps are supported by arches. The cellar rooms, with walls three feet thick, correspond exactly with the rooms above.

Miss Lawrie showed me the dark study in the cellar where the Rev. Charles Murray received some of his callers. The cellar windows have bars of yellowwood, an unusual arrangement. Here, too, were the *houtkamer* (wood store), the *kalk-kamer* (lime room) and the *kaf-kamer* (chaff room). The building has been restored, but no structural changes have been made. All the original doors are there with their yellowwood panels and stinkwood frames. Floors, ceiling timbers and ceilings are of

yellowwood. In the kitchen you see the old hearth and the ham-smoking chamber, which appears to be a replica of one in the Koopmans de Wet House in Cape Town. But the baking oven was designed in a way I had never seen before, for it has its door in the kitchen and an opening in the adjoining room.

I admired the hand-carved, yellowwood staircase up to the loft; the two beautiful flights of curved stone steps into the back garden, the masterpiece of some bygone craftsman; and the cobbled courtyard.

Such was the pastorie which the first Andrew Murray occupied in 1822. It was his home for forty-five years, and for decades it ranked as the finest home in the village. All his children were born there. His son Charles lived on there until 1904, and Helen Murray (a sister of Charles) reoccupied it in 1907 when the old building became a hostel for girls. Here in 1922 the Murrays gathered again to celebrate the centenary of the first Andrew Murray's arrival; more than two hundred out of nearly

five hundred descendants were there, including two daughters and a daughter-in-law.

This was the house which sheltered great missionaries on their way to savage lands. In the diary of Robert Moffat (father-in-law of Livingstone) you will find these words: "Murray of Graaff-Reinet is a renowned friend of Missions, his home is open to all. We were his guests for fourteen days." Livingstone, too, slept under this roof, and long afterwards letters from the explorer were read to the Murray children. French missionaries, some with vivacious wives, were received with the same hospitality - Pellissier and Casalis, Rolland and Arbousset.

It was a rule in the Murray household that food for Sunday should be prepared as far as possible on Saturday. Everyone went to church except the nurse-girl and the baby. The parish was so large that Andrew Murray had to travel great distances, until such places as Aberdeen and Colesberg, Middelburg and Murraysburg, had ministers of their own. But he was a happy

man. One of his daughters recorded that no one ever heard him express a wish to return to Scotland.

Many scenes from Graaff-Reinet's past have been preserved owing to the fact that a photographer, Mr. W. Roe, set up in business there as far back as 1860. He took a picture of the arrival of the Rev. Charles Murray at the pastorie in 1866; and when the memorial to the Rev. Charles Murray was unveiled in 1915, Roe was still there, at the age of eighty-eight, to take the photograph.

Charles Murray, of course, was the gardener of the family, and he made the Graaff-Reinet pastorie garden famous. When he went to Cape Town for the Synod he brought back slips and plants for his own garden and for friends. His garden covered more than six morgen and supplied all the fruit and vegetables for the large pastorie family. He imported Smyrna fig-trees and other fruits from many parts of the world. Just behind the pastorie was the flower-garden. A path was bordered with lilac and

orange trees, with a vineyard on one side. Oats were grown for the horses and lucerne for the cow.

Perhaps the greatest botanical achievement of Charles Murray was the planting of the grape vine which is now the largest (or second largest) in the world. Some say it was a cutting from the Hampton Court giant, which has a main branch one hundred and twenty feet long. Another account gives the South of France as its origin. It is of the "black acorn" species, and Miss Lawrie informed me positively that it was planted in 1870, on the day one of her uncles was born. To-day the circumference of the main stem near the base is seventy-five inches. It is difficult to measure the fruiting branches, but they cover a trellis forty-six feet in length. One branch crossed over a road in the old days into an adjoining property, but this has been cut away. The vine is a "shy bearer", but the ripening grape which I tasted had a good flavour.

Mr. A.A. Kingwill of Graaff-Reinet, a veteran farmer on whose judgment I rely implicitly, once went to Hampton Court and measured the vine. Unfortunately he lost the note-book containing the exact measurements; but he established the fact that the Graaff-Reinet vine was substantially larger. A serious rift appeared in the gnarled stem of the pastorie vine some years ago. This has been cemented, and Mr. Kingwill believes that the vine is safe and growing as vigorously as ever.

I have heard of a vine with a fifty-four inch stem covering a large glass-house roof in the village of Kippen in Stirlingshire. This is claimed by the Scots as the world's largest vine. Mr. A. Gordon Brown, editor of the Union-Castle Year Book, credits Graaff-Reinet with "a grape-vine greater than that at Hampton Court and believed to be the largest in the world." Grapes must have been Charles Murray's favourite fruit.

At one agricultural show he exhibited forty varieties, and he had many more in the pastorie garden.



"Perhaps the greatest botanical achievement of Charles Murray was the planting of the grape vine which is now the largest (or second largest) in the world." The author with the Graaff-Reinet vine.
(Chapter Seven.)

There was a time when Graaff-Reinet suffered from too many vines - or perhaps it would be more correct to say, too much wine. An officer in a British regiment, stationed there in the eighteen-seventies, remarked: "The men could get as drunk as Bacchus for sixpence, and I must say they availed themselves of the opportunity."

But this was a drunken period in Cape history, and other centres were no better. You could buy a bottle of mature Graaff-Reinet brandy for a shilling.

Within living memory Graaff-Reinet depended largely on goats' milk, and the goats were among the sights of the town. At sunset the goats came in from the veld in long procession. Each goat knew its own home and stood patiently at the gate until it was admitted. Goat-carts were widely used, especially for carrying fruit boxes to the railway station.

The man who brought the motor-car to Graaff-Reinet (in the popular sense) was Mr. E.H. Williams, a former marine engineer who had

seen the world before he settled in the town more than half a century ago. He became the agent for the Ford Model T, and under the contract he agreed to keep spares in stock to the tune of fifteen thousand pounds. One day in 1914 someone challenged him to produce every spare part a Model T might need. Mr. Williams organised an assembly line and put his four best mechanics on the job. In three and a half hours they built a Ford from spare parts, and Mr. Williams drove it round the show ring. That was the first Ford ever assembled in South Africa.

Graaff-Reinet's great landmark is Spandau Kop, which the poet Slater called Spandau's Peak in the verse I have quoted. Spandau Kop is a steep cone rising about a thousand feet above the town on the south-western boundary. It can be climbed in about two hours, the last few feet of precipitous rock offering only one fairly easy route. Lichtenstein and other early travellers said that the peak had been named by an old Prussian soldier, Werner, living at Graaff-Reinet, to remind him of the fortress near Berlin; but it is

possible that Spandau is a corruption of an original Hottentot name. Local footballers climb Spandau Kop as part of their training. During my visit I also heard of a ninety-year-old resident, Mr. N.P. Claassens, who was still climbing Spandau Kop regularly.

A notorious coloured house-breaker and murderer of the eighteen-seventies, known as Jan Spandau, had a secret hiding place near the Spandau Kop summit. He evaded the police for a long time, but at last he was caught and hanged at Uitenhage. I found two unsolved murders in the Graaff-Reinet records. One victim was a leading resident named Spiller who was sitting near his dining-room window one night when an unknown hand stabbed him to the heart. Then there was the affair which Scully investigated on the farm Oprysfontein, when a young man named Schoeman and his wife were found shot. Scores of people attended the funeral on the farm. When they walked back from the grave they found the rifle with which the crime had been committed lying in front of the house. It

had been missing until then, and it was obvious that the murderer had chosen this dramatic moment to heighten the mystery. Yet, as I have said, he was never found.

Graaff-Reinet, as you probably know, is a husband and wife name. It was founded in 1786 by Governor Jacobus van der Graaff, whose wife's maiden name was Reynett or Reinet. The settlement was the farthest outpost of the Dutch East India Company's territories, serving as church and local government centre for the districts of Bruintjes Hoogte and Camdeboo.

When you seek the character of Graaff-Reinet, remember how remote it was in those early days and for long afterwards. Remember that these frontier settlers had always to be ready to fight for their lives. They were self-reliant people, independent to a high degree. If they had sent to the Cape for help, there would have been no answer for many weeks; and then, perhaps, the answer would not have been satisfactory. They

had the idea that the government at the Cape cared little about Graaff-Reinet, and they in turn spoke with contempt of their rulers at the faraway Castle in Cape Town. In the Dutch days they declared a republic, the first in South Africa; and soon afterwards they were defying the British invaders.

There is a legend, not without substance, that a Graaff-Reinet patriot cut down a suitable tree, hollowed it out with augers and red hot pokers, bound it with riems for strength, and thus fashioned a wooden cannon. This was mounted on the summit of Magazine Hill, and the patriot with his "army" of twenty-five men loaded the gun with powder, nails, bullets, stones and a bottle as a wad. It was touched off when a British subaltern reached the summit with his redcoats. The home-made gun burst, but there were few casualties. Soon afterwards the little republic was abolished, though a Graaff-Reinet man, Gerotz, was allowed to remain as landdrost.

Barrow, the English traveller, found only twelve families living in a street of mud huts when he

passed through Graaff-Reinet shortly before the end of the eighteenth century. Even the landdrost had a mud house. Ants undermined the clay walls and bats put out the candles. Public business was conducted in hovels. The gaol was so flimsy that a prisoner escaped through a hole in the thatch. Barrow said that there was neither butcher nor chandler, grocer nor baker. He could not buy wine or beer, milk, butter, cheese or vegetables.

Lichtenstein formed very much the same impression a few years later. He said that land at Graaff-Reinet was given out to soldiers who had served their time, "or an European who had not talents sufficient to get his bread in Cape Town ... this was the part to which all such were sent." A former ship's surgeon had established himself in the village at this period, but he complained to Lichtenstein that although he was the only professional man in the district he had scarcely any practice. Yet in almost every house were people with dysenteries, agues, inflammations of the eyes and eruptive disorders.

Eight years afterwards came Burchell, to find a greatly improved village. Fruits and vegetables, this botanist noted, were growing in perfection. He thought the place would soon become a town. "I saw at this time three smiths-shops, a wagon-maker's and several shops or houses at which a variety of European goods might be bought," Burchell reported. "There was also a town butcher and baker, and a *pagter* or retailer of wine and brandy. Along the principal street a row of orange and lemon trees, at this time loaded with fruit, formed a decoration as novel to an English eye, as it was in itself beautiful by the clean, glossy verdure of the foliage and the bright contrast of the golden fruit." Burchell passed some of the time playing an organ he found in the house of Bremmer, a Hollander. His Hottentot servants, on the other hand, sold the sjamboks they had cut from the hides of two rhinos and spent the money on brandy.

Graaff-Reinet made great progress under Andries Stockenstroom, junior (afterwards Sir Andries), who cut the first water furrow round

the steep mountain buttress. He also established the library which I found flourishing under Miss S. McAdam more than one hundred and thirty years later - one of the oldest country libraries in South Africa. People of a better type arrived, including a Mr. Daniel Mills, "a settler of taste and education", and his two accomplished daughters. Doctors and school-teachers made their homes there, and the atmosphere of culture was such that Cape Town newspapers began referring to Graaff-Reinet as the "Athens of the Eastern Cape". About the same time the place was described as "this beautiful village where the inhabitants had given a grand ball and dinner to the circuit court". There was a more sinister feast during the same year when the Sneeuberg district was invaded by locusts. The few Bushmen left in the mountains dined heartily on locusts dried and ground up with meal.

It was in Graaff-Reinet, of course, that some of the most famous Great Trek leaders lived. These quiet streets heard the historic rumbling

as the wagons of Gerrit Maritz and Andries Pretorius began to break the northward trail. Soon afterwards the missionary Backhouse visited Graaff-Reinet, which then had a population of three thousand. "The town stands upon a crescent-shaped flat, bordered by the Zoondag or Sunday's River, in which there was now but little water," Backhouse wrote. "The streets cross at right angles, and are bordered with lemon-trees; the intervening squares are filled up with vineyards and gardens, having hedges of lemon, pomegranate and quince, and being watered from a copious spring in the neighbourhood, by means of ditches. The gardens are stocked with orange, pear, apricot and peach trees. The houses, which stand separately, are built in Dutch style and are whitewashed; they have oleanders and melias or other ornamental trees in front. The blossoms of the oleander and pomegranate were very beautiful, and the air was perfumed by the flowers of the vine." Backhouse added that lions were not plentiful as they had been

in former years. Nevertheless, he came upon seventeen lions and killed five.

Another pleasant description was given by H.H. Methuen. "Houses are neat and picturesque, having large gable-ends to the roofs and little terraces or stoeps on which *mynheer* loves to lounge away the delicious summer evenings, dreamily smoking his eternal pipe," Methuen wrote. "The only hotel is kept by Dresing, who has quite a menagerie in his yard." A later hotel proprietor was John Humphries of the Royal Oak in Market Square, a host who advertised his Welsh rarebits and hot whisky punch during the winter.

Graaff-Reinet had an ivory market up to about 1870, and Roe's pictures show heaps of tusks brought down from the north and offered for sale in Caledon Street.

A public holiday was granted on August 30, 1886, the centenary of the foundation of Graaff-Reinet; but the "Cape Argus" reported that the old families of the town held aloof

from the festivities "as was expected". Graaff-Reinet organised a gala and exhibition of antiques in 1927, however, which everyone supported. Among the hundreds of family treasures were a ship's telescope brought out by a Huguenot, a piece of timber from the Haarlem wreck, ancient spectacles, clocks, watches, lace caps, dresses, shoes, jewellery, violins, walking sticks, a machine for making quill pens and sand boxes for drying letters. A letter written by Elizabeth Joubert to her parents in 1792 on the occasion of her marriage, and the shoes she wore at the wedding, were exhibited. The Booysen family displayed a wood and brass footbath which had been carried in after evening prayers for centuries. Thus did Graaff-Reinet live up to its reputation as a town where every home is a museum.

CHAPTER 8

KAROO SKOFF

*Well, I admit, my friend, your dinner's good
Springbok and Porcupine are dainty food;*

*That lordly pauw was roasted to a turn;
And in your country fruits and Cape
Sauterne,
The wildish flavour's really not unpleasant;
And I may say the same of gnu and
pheasant.*

-Thomas Pringle

MOST of the dishes mentioned in Pringle's poem may be classed as Karoo skoff. But where does that familiar South African word "skoff" come from?

Some say it was brought on shore three centuries ago by Dutch sailors who spoke of "schafter" - to take the noon meal. Others think it arose on the veld. The Afrikaans dictionary gives *skof* as the equivalent of lap, stage or trek. There would be food at the end of the *skof*, and skoff is the Anglicised form.

Karoo skoff, in the early days at all events, was far more homely fare than the intricate spiced and aromatic Dutch-Malay dishes of the old Cape districts. It was meaty and simple, the

camp-fire cookery of people who were always on the move. Woodsmoke was the dominant flavour, rather than saffron or tamarind.

One of Lichtenstein's first meals on the Karoo consisted of Namaqua partridges. They were so abundant, he said, that sixty were brought down in three shots. "In later journeys by myself, when I went beyond the bounds of the colony, they often afforded me a very agreeable repast," the epicurean Lichtenstein reported. I can confirm this judgment. One of the finest meals of my life came out of a three-legged pot in which a *kelkiewyn* stew had been simmering all day. And among the great sights of the wilderness is the swift rush of thousands of these little birds as they sweep down to a pool of water.

Lichtenstein always appreciated an unusual dish and a satisfying meal. He saw an eland shot, cut to pieces at once, salted and packed in skins for smoking on the farm. The great muscle of the thigh, he explained, was particularly esteemed when smoked. Pieces of

this meat resembled bullock's tongues and were called thigh tongues. He also enjoyed very thin slices of raw eland meat, taken with bread and butter. Eland ranks second only to springbok in the scale of antelope meats. It is fat and tender, and resembles young beef.

At one karoo farm Lichtenstein noted that a large chest served as table and smaller chests as seats. First came a good soup made of mutton, then a wild goat roasted; while, as a great treat, by way of dessert, his hosts set before him some white bread and milk.

As a contrast, Lichtenstein described the hospitality of Veld Cornet Peter du Toit of Roodewal farm at the entrance to Hex River Kloof. "We were here entertained so profusely that it almost appeared as if our host was desirous of making amends at a single meal for all the privations to which we had been subjected in our journey through the Karoo," he wrote. Lichtenstein said it was usual to set before any stranger guests specimens of everything the country produced, dressed in every possible way.

Thus it was hardly possible to count the number of dishes brought on with each fresh course.

Peter du Toit's banquet opened with a genuine South African dish, a soup of baked gourds, with small onions sliced in, some salt fish and cayenne pepper. This was the renowned *kalabasbredie*. Lichtenstein declared that bredie, in the Madagascar tongue, meant spinach. It was a word brought to the Cape by the slaves. "Throughout the whole colony," he added, "every sort of vegetable which like cabbage, spinach, or sorrel is cut to pieces and dressed with cayenne pepper, is included under the general term bredie."

The first dish, as a rule, went on Lichtenstein, was a strong soup made of fowls, mutton or veal, seasoned with red pepper and ginger and flavoured with cucumbers and tamarinds. Half-cooked rice was often eaten with this instead of bread.

Next came fish or beef, both cooked with a variety of sauces and many sorts of *atjar* and *sambal*. Under the name of *atjar* was the vast

variety of foods dressed with vinegar and made hot with spices - cauliflower, French beans, gherkins, lemons, unripe maize and the young shoots of the bamboo. Sambal was a mixture of gherkins cut small, onions, anchovies, cayenne pepper and vinegar.

Now the roast. It might be sucking pig, turkey or game, accompanied by six or eight sorts of preserved fruit handed round in little tureens. Chicken and pigeon pasties closed the list of hot dishes.

Desserts included melons, watermelons, grapes, mulberries, peaches, apricots, pome-granates, many sorts of oranges, figs, bananas, fresh almonds and roasted chestnuts. During the meal slaves waited at table while others stood behind the guests with bunches of ostrich feathers keeping off the flies. Lichtenstein certainly fared well on the edge of the Great Karoo.

"Voluntary abstinence would be here, if not absolutely blameable, at least very unnatural

and would be looked upon with contempt rather than admiration," Lichtenstein summed up happily. "All these things are obtained with so little exertion, the value of what anyone forgoes is so insignificant that it might fairly be reckoned a fault not to enjoy what nature so liberally offers."

Such were the views of a trencherman of a century and a half ago. I once came across a description of a karoo farm breakfast with which a traveller fortified himself at the end of last century. It started with hot springbok fry, followed by cold springbok haunch, cold korhaan, steaming coffee with goats' milk, *koekies* of boer meal, springbok biltong planed thin, wild honey, stewed peaches, tomato and lettuce. So the gigantic appetite had not passed fifty years ago. Here and there it survives today.

Mr. J.P. Louw, a karoo farmer, once invited an English neighbour and his family to a Christmas dinner. It started with strained vegetable soup, cooked with springbok and

sucking pig *pootjies*, and accompanied by whole wheat bread rolls. Next came stewed fowl with tapioca sauce; then-fried cockerels stuffed with livers of cockerels, sucking-pig and springbok. These trifling dishes paved the way for the sucking-pig, the home-cured ham, and the stuffed leg of springbok oven-fried in butter with a sprinkling of coriander.

Among the vegetables were green peas, green beans cooked with springbok ribs, yellow rice and raisins, squashes with butter sauce, and fried potatoes in clear jellied gravy. The salads consisted of lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber sambal and cooked young spring onions with egg sauce.

Boiled fruit pudding with brandy sauce then appeared, the alternatives being churned milk baked with egg custard and melktert. Among the drinks were thirty-year-old dop brandy and Van der Hum.

It was a hot day, and everyone slept until four in the afternoon. Coffee was served with

watermelon, tomato and agurkies preserve. Not long after this entertainment, Mr. Louw's son married the English neighbour's daughter, while the Englishman's son married one of Mr. Louw's daughters, with happy results. But that memorable Christmas dinner was served three decades ago. The wool cheques are larger now, but the meals are usually much smaller.

Venison takes many shapes on karoo tables. A recipe which I thoroughly enjoyed was that devised by Anna Kok, regional home economics officer at Victoria West. Rub your leg of venison well with salt and pepper, lard it with smoked bacon, and leave it in vinegar for two or three days. Add a few cloves, lemon leaves, a sprig of thyme, some bruised peppercorns and a little burnt coriander. Remove the leg from the vinegar and place in a roasting pan. Rub in flour and place pieces of fat on top. Baste often while roasting. Add a little sour cream to the gravy. Baste until the meat is done.

In the old-time karoo kitchens there were few iron stoves with ovens. Pots hung from hooks in the wall above the hearth; or three-legged pots stood over the flames. The oven was built of brick or clay without a chimney, and shaped rather like a tented wagon. The iron door opened into the kitchen, while the oven, up to five feet in length, jutted outside. Sometimes the oven was a little detached building in the yard near the kitchen. A rare sight nowadays is an ant-heap hollowed out for use as an oven. The housewife who still uses the old oven reserves it for bread, cakes, certain puddings and pies and vegetables such as sweet potatoes and pumpkin. Meat is pot-roasted. Far more skill is needed when bread is baked in these ovens. The trick is to get the fire well alight just inside the door, then push the burning wood back and add more fuel. It takes about an hour of clever stoking before the oven is red-hot and ready for the dough.

Fire and ash are then raked out, and the housewife comes into action as fast as possible

with her *broodskop*. This is a broad plank with a handle. It carries the dough into the far corners of the oven. Forty loaves, perhaps, are dropped into position, and then the iron door is shut and sealed with clay.

Whole-meal bread, leavened with sour dough, was often baked in large earthenware pots in the old days. This gave a light, sweet loaf. But I believe there is a rare karoo plant, consisting almost entirely of root, which makes bread rise more surely than any yeast or baking powder.

You will find the *perdemeul* still in use on some farms in the North West Cape and Namaqualand. Horses or donkeys walk round grinding the wheat. Any farmers' wife will tell you that this stone-ground flour, known as *plaasmeel*, rises more surely and produces tastier bread than the flour from a modern mill. It seems that the trace minerals, the almost microscopic dust from the grinding stones, add virtue to the bread.

On trek, of course, there is still *asbrood*, dough baked in the ashes, or *roosterbrood*, for which a gridiron is used. There is also a type of *asbrood*, a mixture of meal and water and soda baked in cakes in the campfire embers, known as *stormjaers* (dumplings). Dough becomes a delicacy when it is served as *slinger-om-die-smoel* (literally, "pendulum-round-the-jaw"), a favourite in Nieuwoudtville district. This is a thin dough cut into strips and prepared with milk. It calls for expert handling, like spaghetti. Another dish often served in this district has a Hottentot name, T'ghoeboekoring, uncrushed wheat cooked as a substitute for rice.

Mealie bread consists of cooked, pounded mealies mixed with eggs, spices and milk and steamed in a greased dish. It is then sliced and eaten with melted butter. Stamped mealies were served at almost every meal on the karoo farms fifty or sixty years ago. The ripe yellow grains were moistened and placed in a hollow treestump or wooden mortar. The centre of a wagon-wheel was brought into play as pestle, and the husks were

removed. Then the mealies were boiled gently until they became tender as young peas.

In districts where cows are rare, goats' milk is widely used. The farm churns produce a fine snow-white goat butter; and in the Calvinia district there is a goat cheese which rivals the Swiss gruyere.

A dish seldom tasted outside the North West Cape is *suurlower*, composed of squares of sheep's liver, flour, vinegar, salt and the part of the sheep's intestines known as the *vetderm*. Karoo folk believe that the *vetderm* is an excellent remedy for acidity in children. Then there is that rare delicacy *eiervrugte*, or lambs' testicles. The lamb should not be older than about two months. Remove the surrounding membrane, soak the testicles in salt water for twenty minutes, then boil until soft. Add flour, and flavour with salt, pepper and vinegar.

Karoo brawn, known as *bron* or *silt* in Afrikaans, is composed of sheep's head, tripe and trotters. The meat must be extremely tender after cooking

with curry powder and dried apricots. It is then cooled, bones are removed and the mixture is minced. After further boiling it forms a porridge and is poured into a glass dish to set.

My friend, Mr. A.P. (Tickey) Loxton, a Kenhardt hotelkeeper, has a theory about diet which may have some substance. He says the shepherds of the Kenhardt district, wizened men of Bushman-Hottentot-Koranna descent, seem to live for ever. They light a fire on a flat, black stone known as a *kaaiklip*. When the stone is really hot a space is made in the centre of the fire and the shepherd cooks his simple meal of *askoek* (ash-scone) and *gebraaide skaapribbetjies* (grilled sheeps ribs). Mr. Loxton believes that if a shepherd reaches the century mark on this diet (with whatever *veldkos* he can collect), then others might follow his example. I have an idea, however, that walking after the flock in the fresh air also has something to do with the shepherd's longevity.

Truffles are found in the red sand of the North West Cape, the marvellous underground fungus that the epicure Brillat Savarin called "the

diamonds of the kitchen". Three species have been identified, all of the genus *terfezia*. But whereas in France you look for truffles round oak trees, in the desert regions of the Cape you find them near the thorny acacia bush known to botanists as *acacia hebeclada*. Bushmen hunt the truffle with dogs, just like the more advanced truffle collectors in Perigord and Piedmont. Truffles are known to the Bushmen as *t'naba*. Goats also find the deep cracks in the desert where the truffles are skulking. You may have to dig only a few inches, or the truffles may be four feet deep. Some truffles are no larger than your thumb, others reach the size of an apple.

It takes a chef to make the most intelligent use of truffles. Farmers on the Cape frontier simply boil them, and eat them with butter, pepper and salt, but they taste insipid. The peculiarity of truffles is the unusual penetrating fragrance which blends perfectly with certain other foods and improves them. You can even flavour an egg through the shell by leaving it in contact with truffles. I am assured that certain truffles from

the Gordonia district are equal to many French and Italian species, given the right treatment in the kitchen.

Truffles are rarities known only to a few in South Africa, but the kambro root has, been eaten by white and coloured in all the arid karoo regions for centuries. Thunberg, in 1774, was referring to kambro when he wrote: "The Hottentots who traverse these dry carrow fields use several means not only to assuage their hunger but more particularly to quench their thirst."

The French traveller Le Vaillant described a journey with his native servant Kees when they were both almost dying from heat, thirst and exhaustion. Kees suddenly dropped to the ground and scraped with both hands. Le Vaillant helped with his dagger until they unearthed a kambro root which they halved and devoured. No wonder Le Vaillant called it "precious fruit" in his narrative.

Lichtenstein also referred to the kambro in these words: "The Bosjesmans on the other side of the Great River feed much upon the bulbous root of their kambros, a plant yet little known to botanists and undefined by them."

Kambro has been identified since then as a *Fockea* species. It resembles a large sweet potato, first tasting bitter, then sweet. Shepherds still dig it out gratefully to quench their thirst. Many farmers' wives turn chunks of it into *konfyt* by soaking it in lime water and cooking it with ginger.

An unusual karoo *konfyt* is made of *wildekommers*. These are peeled and left overnight in a mixture of water and bicarbonate of soda. Weigh the wild cucumbers in the morning. Add an equal weight of sugar and water, which must be deep enough to cover the cucumbers. Boil the syrup first, then add the cucumbers and continue boiling until the *konfyt* is thick.

Many varieties of *uintjies* (edible bulbs) are found in the karoo. Some are eaten raw, others stewed with meat. Gaap is scraped and used in salads; it

has a sour-sweet flavour, and enjoys a great reputation in the Kenhardt district (when taken with gin or brandy) as a cure for stomach complaints. Certain *uintjies* taste like chestnuts and make a strong soup. All the foods that come under the heading of *veldkos* are most relished by trekboers, shepherds and hungry school-children.

"That lordly pauw was roasted to a turn," remarked the poet. You are unlikely to taste a gompou (modern spelling, great bustard), on the karoo nowadays, as they are classed as royal game. I have shot and eaten them in Bechuanaland, however, and a more satisfying game-bird one could not hope to encounter. Selous shot a forty-pound gompou, and I have heard of even larger specimens. The luscious breast is dark on the outside, white beneath.

Gompou should be stuffed with a forcemeat of ham, suet, lemon, marjoram, parsley, breadcrumbs and eggs, and roasted like turkey. Very small game-birds are sometimes wrapped in fat pork and simmered in a broth of herbs. The hunter H.A. Bryden devised a recipe for game-birds which is

worth repeating. He stewed five guinea fowls and three partridges with water, sliced onions, potatoes, two dessert spoonfuls of Worcester sauce, two wineglasses of red Cape Pontac, pepper and salt and half a teacupful of flour and water mixed into a paste.

Porcupines are rodents, but they taste like pork and their "crackling" is better than pork. They know how to defend themselves, and it is not easy to dig a porcupine out of its lair; so you seldom find porcupine on the menu. Nevertheless, porcupine makes a grand dish. As a large porcupine weighs sixty pounds, there is usually enough for everybody. First you take out the quills, scald and scrape the body to remove the hair. Wash the skin, which is the greatest delicacy, and let it soak in water, with pepper and salt added, overnight. Now boil the skin in fresh water until soft, cut into neat pieces and grill over a charcoal fire. Serve with butter and lemon. The flesh may be stewed or roasted.

Hedgehogs are far more common in the karoo than porcupines. They have the flavour of

sucking-pig. First the hedgehog is embedded in clay, then cooked in the embers of an open fire. When the clay is properly baked it cracks, and the succulent hedgehog may be removed while the prickles are left behind in the clay.

Another old karoo delicacy was the anteater or *erdvark*, but this is protected nowadays. The thick part of the neck was used, and a thin layer of skin scraped off, like pork. Then the meat was spiced with salt, pepper and coriander, soaked in vinegar for two days, and roasted in pot or oven:

Tortoises live on medicinal herbs, their flesh is tender and tasty as chicken. So there is a great demand for tortoises in the country, both as medicine and food. I heard in Namaqualand of a farmer's wife who appeared to be dying of tuberculosis. The coloured labourers collected all the tortoises they could find within miles of the farm house; scores of tortoises had their heads chopped off so that the patient could drink the warm blood. And she recovered

completely, gaining weight to an embarrassing measure.

Dr. Louis Leipoldt used to recommend tortoise soup as a tonic. The whole tortoise is boiled down, and then the juice is strained off and taken. Among the best parts are the legs and the liver. Tortoise meat is at its best when scalloped with breadcrumbs, butter, salt and lemon. Tortoise eggs, which are about the size of golf-balls, are rich and nourishing. Karoo cooks will tell you that these eggs make grand omelettes, and impart the most subtle flavour to cakes. The most common method of dealing with a tortoise is to cut off the head, then cover the whole shell with live coals from an open fire. Crack the shell to find out when the tortoise is done.

Queerest of Namaqualand luxuries is the dish known as *rysmiere*, the famous "antrice" which is eaten by some white people and all the coloured population. It is not gathered every day. Wise old Hottentots scan the heavens for

the signs that the antheaps are in a fit state to be robbed.

You approach the ant-heap with a *rys-yster*, a flat piece of iron which gives out a dull sound if the ants are at home. After rain, as a rule, satisfactory hauls of ants are made. Another almost infallible sign is the budding of the '*ngomsganna* plant. The edible ants are not the ordinary inhabitants of the ant-heap; they are the young king and queen ants which later forsake the heap on wings.

Having secured your *rysmiere*, throw them into lukewarm water and they will float. Other ants, which may be mixed with them but which are not so tasty, will sink. Dry the *rysmiere* in the wind and grill in a frying-pan. Keep the abundant fat which is given out, as this is Namaqualand's most valued ointment for sores, bruises and burns. Spread your grilled ants on bread and butter. Some people feed their fowls on *rysmiere*. Hens flourish on this diet, and it imparts the authentic ant flavour to the eggs.

Biltong, I suppose, must rank as the most typical and traditional karoo food. Springbok makes the finest antelope biltong in the world; but in Bushmanland there are biltong varieties which I have never seen elsewhere. These are made from ribs and legs of sheep and goats. You can make biltong out of any meat, and even lion has been used.

Then there is a controversial dish called *tassalletjies* which is made differently in almost every Cape district. I place it in the biltong class because some cooks dry the meat in the wind after it has been laid in vinegar. The strips of preserved meat hang from the rafters in the loft, like biltong, until they are required. Then they are grilled on the coals. *Tassaletjies* appears to be derived from the Portuguese *tassalho*, meaning preserved meat.

Coffee is the beverage of the karoo, and few of those who live there now can be aware that tea was the drink of their ancestors. Yet if you had stopped a smous on the karoo a century and a half ago he would probably have had only

packets of tea to offer you. They drank it weak, without milk or sugar.

By the time of the Great Trek, coffee had become firmly established. I have never discovered the reason for the change of taste; though it is on record that the Dutch East India Company sent coffee plants to the Cape, and that certain farmers grew coffee successfully during the eighteenth century and after the second British occupation. But it was a curiosity which did not pay. The main supply of coffee came from Brazil and other countries.

By all accounts, the old farmers appreciated good, pure coffee and only adulterated it when supplies were running short. They roasted their coffee beans in iron cylinders and ground their coffee with stones. Copper kettles were used for the brew.

Karoo travellers are still liable to encounter weird coffee mixtures. Oom Jan clings to the favourite old blend consisting of peas roasted and ground with the coffee beans. Roasted

wheat, barley and mealies are often used. Some families mix coffee with roasted peach or prickly pear peels on account of the distinctive flavour. Carrots and ripe figs, dried and ground, are also found in many a karoo coffee mixture. Mealie coffee was the choice of the men in the commandos during the South African War, at times when no real coffee was obtainable. It warmed them in the cold light of many a winter karoo dawn.

Where the *witgatboom* grows, of course, a coffee shortage causes no trouble. This tree, also known as the shepherd's tree, is found in many parts of the Great Karoo and westwards all the way to Namaqualand. It grows by itself, to a height of twenty feet, sometimes offering the only shade for miles.

Shepherds love the *witgatboom* for other reasons as well. It is an evergreen, the berries can be eaten by men and animals and sheep thrive on the leaves. Burchell, in the North West Cape, was the first to describe it. It has a white trunk, and the shapely tree is drought-

resistant. Dig up the roots of this tree, and when they have been dried in the sun, roasted and ground you can make the karoo's most famous coffee substitute, *witgatkoffie*. Some say that too much of it is bad for the eyes. It is certainly a far more powerful concoction than mealie and bran substitutes. Until you become used to it, *witgatkoffie* often acts as a purgative.

Finally there is *ghookoffie*, made from the fruit of the wild almond tree. When fresh, the fruit produces symptoms of poisoning in some people. After long soaking in fresh water, however, it may be dried and roasted without fear of ill-effects.

Sugar was often a luxury on remote farms. Honey was the usual substitute, though some were able to secure *bossiestroop*, the thin syrup found in certain protea flowers. Honey is also transformed into honey beer. The brewers squeeze out the honeycomb into lukewarm water, allowing two gallons of honey to one gallon of water. Yeast is added to hasten the

fermentation. This is a drink which rivals that liquid fire of the North West Cape known as *witblits*.

Witblits, of course, is home-distilled dop brandy with a high alcoholic content. On lonely farms the grapes are still pressed in the *balies* (large vats) with bare feet. Some days later the liquid mos is passed into the old *brandewynketel* or still, made to very much the same pattern as those used by Tennessee "moonshiners". A slow fire then gives a pure, strong *witblits* - white lightning because it has none of the colour imparted to more respectable brandies by their casks.

Farmers are allowed to distil small quantities of *witblits* for their own use. If the excise officer discovers a surplus, the high duty must be paid. Thus every additional *vaatjie*, earthenware jar and wicker-covered demijohn must be hidden with the greatest ingenuity and smuggled away to eager neighbours under loads of pumpkins.

CHAPTER 9 SWARTBERG AND LITTLE KAROO

*Sudden the desert changes
The yaw glare softens and clings,
Till the aching Oudtshoorn ranges
Stand up like the thrones of kings.*

-Rudyard Kipling

A LONG the northern edge of the Little Karoo runs one of South Africa's great mountain ranges. This is the Swartberg chain, the "Black Mountains" of the old travellers. Those visitors of a century and a half ago spoke in wonder not only of the deep poorts and snowy peaks, but also of the patriarchs and other strong characters they found living in mountain solitudes.

The long barrier of the Swartberg, stretching eastwards from Touws River for hundreds of miles, halts the precious rainclouds drifting up from the coast and robs the thirsty Great Karoo of its water. It is still possible to find scenes of wonder in the Swartberg, second only to the Drakensberg in size. And civilization has not yet

overtaken all the hermits and personalities of the lonely places.

Give me a choice of gateways into the Great Karoo and I would always take the Swartberg Pass. I have travelled only one road in my lifetime more dramatic, and that was the fifteen-thousand foot pass beyond Darjeeling that leads into Tibet. You can freeze to death as surely on one as on the other.

On the Swartberg Pass summit you are more than five thousand feet above sea level. Long before the pass was built there was a track for pack-animals, so that white smallholders in incredibly remote valleys could reach the outside world. Those were the steepest tracks in the country, just as the present Swartberg Pass is steeper on both sides than any other main road pass in South Africa. A gradient of one in three can be sensational.

When I first went to Prince Albert, the *onderdorp* at the foot, there were many who remembered Thomas Bain the surveyor and the

convicts who built the pass. Today you must seek men in the seventies and eighties for such memories. Thomas Bain, of course, was the second son of the redoubtable Andrew Geddes Bain of Bain's Kloof. Taught by his father, Thomas finally achieved equal fame as a road-builder.

Bain was approached after the failure in 1881 of a contractor named Tassie: This man had assured the authorities that he could build the pass for £18,000, and started work with one hundred natives. Within two months all his labourers had drifted away. Bain then planted his flags along the mighty curves of the footpath which was to become the pass. One thousand convicts, forty constables with rifles and dogs, twenty warders with revolvers, arrived on foot from Prince Albert Road station - as grim a cavalcade as ever the Great Karoo had seen.

Among the eighteen convict gangs was only one composed of white men. Well-behaved convicts were drafted to the *koffiespan* and

received coffee, sugar and tobacco with their rations. There was a *kettingspan* (chain-gang) for difficult customers. You can still see the ruins of the stone huts where the convicts lived. Not far away are the graves, one hundred and fifty graves of convicts who failed to survive the five years of hard labour on the pass.

Even in midsummer it is sometimes chilly on the Swartberg Pass summit. Winter can be deadly. At times even the harddriven convicts had to be ordered indoors while snowstorms raged. One night the roof of a hut collapsed under four feet of snow and thirty convicts were frozen to death.

McKay and Rose had the food contract. They put a young couple, the Stockenstrooms, in charge of a store and butchery near the summit. Every day cattle and sixteen sheep were slaughtered for the convict's "soup". In addition, each man received a loaf of bread and beans. Many died on that stupendous pass, as I have said, but there was also one birth.

Without the aid of doctor or midwife, Mrs. Stockenstroom had a son. Jim Stockenstroom spent the first seven years of his life at the store on the summit. He is one of those who remember the convict gangs, and the sound of the bells rung every five minutes by the warders at night to show they were alert.

Yes, some of those convicts paid in full on the Swartberg for their crimes. Murderers toiled beside illicit diamond buyers and thieves. It was the pick and shovel period, with never a machine to lighten the merciless task. They made the pass with their hands, and no champagne came their way when Colonel Schermbrucker, Minister of Public Works, drove up for the opening ceremony.

"Bain is a wonderful man," remarked Schermbrucker in his speech. "Show him an easy place to make a road and he shakes his head. But show him a place where a monkey can't get out, and he will jump at it like a cat." And indeed Bain's achievement stands to this day as an example of steep gradients which

have turned out to be safe. The high walls help, of course; there is a clear view ahead; and careful drivers have never had anything to fear. It cost eighty thousand pounds, that pass, and Bain gave wonderful value for the money.

Soon after the opening a mail-coach service was organized, with Mr. Jan Haak holding the postal contract. Every day before dawn the coach left Prince Albert Road station, drawn by six mules. It reached Oudtshoorn at four in the afternoon, and the passenger fare was thirty shillings. One driver, an expert in his way, entertained passengers by aiming jets of tobacco juice at the Swartberg lizards, scoring more hits than misses. But it was hard on the mules; a mule seldom lasted more than a year on that run.

There grew up along the route one of South Africa's sagas of transport-riding. Practically all the Oudtshoorn produce went over the Swartberg by wagon to Prince Albert Road station until 1903, when the railway approached Oudtshoorn and diverted the

traffic. Snow was the hazard the drivers had to face in winter, and tales of their ordeals are still told.

Karoo farmers, accustomed to heat, did not always realise the danger of the biting winter cold. They would drive their teams to the limit, so that when the hot animals were unyoked or unharnessed at the Toll House on the summit they were in great peril. Many a strong mule fell dead because the owner did not keep the team going when the temperature was below zero. Wise drivers abandoned their wagons when snowstorms threatened, and hurried their animals down the pass to the outspan below the snowline.

It was during a severe winter in the late eighteen-eighties that a tobacco farmer with his wife and seven children was approaching the Swartberg Pass summit in a blizzard. He had two wagons loaded with roll arid leaf tobacco. By using double teams, one wagon brought the family through the sleet and snow to the Toll House. The other wagon was soon

buried under the snow. Most of the men of the party rushed the cattle down the pass and were unable to return. That left the family marooned on the summit, cut off from the world below by snowdrifts.

A bungalow where Bain's foremen had lived was still standing, and in this cottage the family took refuge. Fire was the first necessity for survival, and they had to break up the furniture to keep the fire going. They had enough food, but as the days passed and the blizzard still raged, their fire became a problem causing deep anxiety. When all the furniture had been consumed they tore off the inner doors and wooden fittings. One young girl developed a temperature, became delirious and died. Another daughter then developed hysteria. She was alive at the end of a week, when the snowstorm lifted, but died after her family had reached safety in Prince Albert.

Another tragedy of the summit occurred in 1901, when a police constable was a passenger in the mail-coach, with a coloured boy he was

escorting to the reformatory in Cape Town. A storekeeper with a reckless sense of humour was also travelling, and he passed the time pleasantly by pretending that he was going to help the prisoner to escape. When the coach halted on the summit the joker went too far and the constable drew his revolver. It went off, and the storekeeper was shot through the heart. The constable was charged with culpable homicide at Worcester circuit court and acquitted.

I believe the first motorist to conquer the Swartberg Pass was Dr. G. Russell of Oudtshoorn. His first attempt, very early this century, failed on the steep "Buchu Draai" section; but later, with the aid of Mr. Donald Menzies, he was successful. Even to-day the careful motorist has to watch his radiator when he climbs the pass.

Mountains cast a queer spell over certain eccentric humans. Until a few years ago a white troglodyte named Oom Hennie Alberts lived in a cave near the Swartberg Pass; a man

who has now become a legend in the district. Oom Hennie carried a goatskin umbrella winter and summer, like Robinson Crusoe. He had a Man Friday, a white simpleton known as Ou Hendrik Rheeders.

Oom Hennie disliked walking, so he built himself a small hand-cart. Ou Hendrik pushed, and thus the two wild, bearded men of the mountains were seen occasionally in Prince Albert village. It was Oom Hennie's pleasure to recite doggerel of his own composition. At a moment's notice he could turn any idea into a strange, effortless rhyme. Oom Hennie is dead, but Ou Hendrik was still living in a cave, without a scrap of furniture, without blankets, without nothing more than a cooking pot and a spoon, when I last heard of him. He was planting mealies and pumpkins in the dry river bed, selling firewood in the village, and turning all visitors resolutely away.

An earlier eccentric in these parts was a farmer nicknamed Mal Theunis. His madness, however, was the result of an accident which

was typical of the lurking dangers of the Swartberg range. Theunis went into the mountains with his father after a leopard which had killed a calf. They cornered the leopard in its cave in a krans with a seventy-foot drop below, the ground at the foot being covered with thornbush and the spiky mimosa saplings used for fencing. One of the dogs, a ferocious, yellow, stump-tailed baboon slayer, went in boldly and took the leopard in the rear. After a short fight the dog emerged with its scalp missing and the leopard in pursuit.

The father had his flintlock muzzle-loader with him, an oldfashioned "Sanna". He fired and wounded the leopard, which rushed at Theunis and gripped his shoulder. Locked together, Theunis and the leopard went over the cliff.

The leopard was impaled on the sharp trees and was killed at once. Theunis fell clear into soft sand. He was carried back to the farm and remained unconscious for days. The doctor, after a ride of fifty miles on horseback, pulled him round; but he

was never the same after that experience. He was Mal Theunis.

Bushmen were the only human beings in the present Swartberg Pass neighbourhood until late in the eighteenth century. Then a white pioneer named Samuel de Beer arrived and secured his ground from the Bushmen in one of those enviable transactions where the savages went away delighted with a few knives and rolls of tobacco.

De Beer suspected that the Bushmen might return, and when he went out to inspect his cattle that night he gave his wife Leonara a gun. Hearing a shot, he raced back to the wagon. His wife reassured him. "It was only a lion", she remarked.

Kweekvallei, the "valley of cultivation", was the name De Beer chose for his farm. A few years later he was settled firmly on the site of the present Prince Albert village. He was able to irrigate his gardens and vineyards from a strong spring in the hill behind the homestead; and he was supplying

the Cape Town market with butter, dried fruits and wine.

General Janssens and Lichtenstein visited him there in 1804, and found that De Beer had paraded the whole population (about twenty people) armed with muskets. De Beer himself wore a sword in honour of the occasion, while his eldest children played fifes. Three salutes were fired. The Batavian tricolor flew over the house.

De Beer provided an excellent dinner, and Lichtenstein carried samples of the wine back to Europe with him and reported that it was esteemed by connoisseurs almost as highly as Constantia. The brandy, added Lichtenstein, when distilled anew with charcoal powder, was equal to the best cognac. Lichtenstein, however, formed a less favourable impression of his host. He described him as a vain, bigoted, dominating political fanatic who looked with contempt on his neighbours. De Beer, he said, had been born in Paarl and had acquired courtly manners and refinement before settling in the wilderness. De Beer asserted that Africa was the most fertile and blessed country on

the globe and would produce everything if the peasants were less idle and stupid. The fertility of his own farm proved it. He also impressed on his visitors that he was a very rich man and a genius; but it was clear to Lichtenstein that he was hated by his neighbours and dependents.

De Beer had a profound veneration for the heroes of the French revolution. He had named his two youngest sons John Bonaparte and Nicholas Moreau. At the age of three Bonaparte fell into a water cistern and was drowned.

Such was the man who became known much later as the "Father of Prince Albert". Samuel de Beer entertained many travellers at this outpost. Lord Charles Somerset appointed him Veldkornet of the district. Towards the end of his life De Beer went to live at Kleinplasia near the present Swartberg Pass route, and the ruins of his home are still to be seen.

Prince Albert, unlike other Great Karoo villages, has a flavour of the Western Province about it. You find a number of gracious old houses with gables,

the oldest bearing the date 1841, a year before the village was officially proclaimed a township. Some of these fine homes have been traced to one Carel Lotz, a clever builder who learnt his craft in Tulbagh and settled in Prince Albert in the early eighteen-forties. Dr. Mary Cook, authority on old Cape architecture, has pointed out that early paintings of karoo villages prove that many places, such as Colesberg, once had gables, but nearly all of them have vanished. Prince Albert is fortunate in having had property owners who preserved these gems.

Several villages in the Great Karoo have had their golden dreams, and Prince Albert was one of them. Alluvial nuggets of gold have been found in the district again and again. During a rush in the nineties of last century hopes ran so high that a local newspaper called the "Gough Gold News" was started. On one farm a koppie known as Donkiekop was re-named Goudkop after gold worth two thousand pounds had been recovered by prospectors. Diamond drills have been used in recent years in the hope of tracing the reef; but it

must be admitted that the Prince Albert peach crop (a hundred tons a day at the height of the season) is still far more valuable than the gold.

Among the historic relics displayed at Prince Albert is an old cannon, possibly from a Dutch East India ship, which found its way to the old farm Rosendal, about forty miles from the village. More than a century ago the cannon was fired every New Year's day; and every year when the harvest had been gathered at Rosendal the cannon was always fired in the direction of the village to spread the news.

Through the Swartberg, linking the Great Karoo with the Little Karoo, winds a narrow poort with a mysterious name - Seven Weeks Poort.

Some say that an early trekboer entered the poort in the hope of finding a short cut to the present Laingsburg area and wandered through the break in the mountains for seven weeks before he emerged on to the plains. He may

have been delayed by floods, of course, for you must cross the river twenty-six times in the poort, and in winter the stream is swollen. But that does not satisfy me, for the poort is only thirteen miles long.

Another legend describes a hunt for a stock-thief who fled into the poort and hid there for seven weeks before he was cornered. I think it is far more likely that the name is a corruption. One of the Berlin Mission Society's preachers years ago was Zerwick, and the original name was probably Zerwickspoort. Here, too, are memories of convicts who built the road and left three ruined prisons as relics of their toil.

Strangest of all the Swartberg poorts is Gamkaskloof (Lion's Kloof), which might have remained an unknown paradise if some evil genius had not given it the nickname of "The Hell". No doubt he was feeling the heat of the valley, shut in by mountains and walls of sun-baked rock. The people of "The Hell" have been cursing him for it ever since, for the nickname has brought inquisitive visitors and

sensational articles have displeased the hard-working community.

Calitzdorp is the nearest village, but "The Hell" can be reached in comfort only by helicopter. It has no road, nothing but a track for pack-donkeys. As there are only about twenty families living in the kloof, the road-makers have by-passed this solitude. You must leave your car at Matjiesvlei farm and struggle along the Gamka river banks on foot for two or three hours, sometimes knee-deep in water, to meet white people who have never seen the outside world.

That is the main claim to fame of the less ambitious Gamkaskloof people. One man over eighty, born and brought up in the kloof, has never seen fit to venture beyond the entrance; and there are other stay-at-homes. A few have been forced out by illness and a tetanus patient had to be carried for miles on a stretcher. But they do not like it. One middle-aged Gamkaskloof stalwart who was sent to hospital in Cape Town a few years ago told a visitor: "I

will not even look out of the window. There are far too many people here - millions of them. And the motor-cars will kill you if you give them a chance. I shall certainly never allow my wife and children to come to this place."

In the valley the woman school-teacher also acts as doctor and holds Sunday services. At one time a visiting minister officiated at marriages. Now enterprising young people go to church at Calitzdorp or Prince Albert. Divorces are unknown. No one thinks of starting a lawsuit of any kind, for that would mean leaving the valley.

If these people had an easier time they would, no doubt, leave their homes occasionally in search of new scenes. But the fact is that their irrigated holdings demand constant attention. They grow wheat and prepare the special Gamkaskloof dried fruit which is noted for its flavour. Hanepoot raisins, dried figs, peaches and apricots go out on donkeys, each donkey carrying one hundred pounds of produce. Carts and wagons are used on a few farms within the valley. These were bought outside, carried to the river, taken to pieces, and

floated down to the farms years ago. No one has yet found a way of bringing in a tractor. Old-fashioned watermills grind the wheat.

Some of the people retain the delightful attitude towards banks which was more common in South Africa last century, when golden sovereigns were hoarded in wagon-chests under the bed. One little capitalist in "The Hell" decided to hide his savings in his bee-hive. He knew how to handle bees, and he left several hundred pounds in charge of the bees, mentioning the cache in his will. But the bees disliked the odour of his beneficiaries, and those who disturbed the hive suffered heavily.

One of the Mosterts of Gamkaskloof made a remarkable discovery there some years ago. He was searching for lost donkeys when he entered an old Bushman cave and found a medal. It bore the date 1690 and had been issued by William of Orange (later King William III of England) to his soldiers. Probably the Bushman had robbed a colonist, victim of a poisoned arrow.

Bushmen were the first human beings to find sanctuary in this kloof, and for centuries they were secure in their caves. Hottentots under a Kaptein David Kever, armed with guns, drove them out at last and settled in the kloof about the end of the eighteenth century. Kever had adopted or kidnapped a white child, Danie Hartman, who grew up there. At last Danie decided to leave the Hottentots and seek his own people. His stories of Gamkaskloof seem to have aroused the interest of certain farmers during the restless period before the Great Trek. They were looking round for a lonely area where no British officials would be likely to irritate them, and in or about the year 1830 they moved into Gamkaskloof. Some of their descendants are still there.

The first writer to penetrate this remote stronghold was Deneys Reitz. He and his companions were trying to rejoin General Smuts on the Great Karoo, and they chose the route through Gamkaskloof as one where they would be most unlikely to be intercepted by British troops. Reitz gave a fine description in

"Commando" of the shaggy giant in goatskins, one of the Cordier family, who spoke an outlandish Afrikaans dialect and showed him great hospitality.

"We spent the night and the next day with this curious Swiss family Robinson, and in the evening toiled up the cliffs again, accompanied by our host and some of his colts, who stayed with us around our camp-fires," Reitz wrote. "The following morning they led us across rugged mountains until by dark we looked down at last upon the Northern plains."

The people of "The Hell" knew very well that the South African War was being fought. They had made a queer artillery piece from a hollow tree-trunk, loaded with gunpowder and stones. With this weapon they hoped to repel a British invasion. Fortunately the fighting never reached Gamkaskloof.

Men brought up in Gamkaskloof are cunning hunters. Leopards, jackals and baboons often attack their donkeys, sheep and goats; but

many a leopard skin (five pounds reward), many a jackal's tail (fifty shillings) and baboon tail (seven shillings and sixpence) is handed in at the Calitzdorp magistrate's office. Years ago the hunters were able to live on hunting alone - the life, for some men, with a charm which nothing else in the world can equal. Now they are resigned to tending their orchards and flocks; but always with a gun handy.

Housing in the kloof is neat but not inspiring. You will look in vain for gracious Cape gables and Batavian bricks. Thatch is there, but walls are of pressed mud. One woman built herself a cottage with these simple materials in four months. She really did build it herself, for there are only two coloured families living in the kloof and the people are accustomed to doing labourer's work themselves. In this and other ways, Gamkaskloof is a little world unlike any other part of South Africa ... isolated but resourceful, far from rich but largely self-contained.

Those who go shopping at Calitzdorp or Prince Albert for themselves and others are inclined to put it off as long as possible. A young man in search of a wife may march out gladly. When it means bringing back donkey-loads of paraffin and coffee, sugar and other groceries, then once in two or three months is often enough.

Old industries survive in the valleys of the Little Karoo. Lichtenstein found a Dane named Nielsen within one of the recesses of the Swartberg, and this man was extracting the oil from the blossoms and rinds of the oranges he grew. He also cultivated peppermint, aniseed and fennel with the same object, and sold his oils to the Cape Town apothecaries.

I doubt whether there is anything left of Nielsen's enterprise. But the *riem-breij* industry, a romantic survival, may be watched in a Swartberg kloof about thirty miles from

Oudtshoorn. On the farm Heuningkrans members of the De Jager family make the *trektou*, the heavy trace for linking the pairs of oxen to a wagon; and it is the plaited raw hide *trektou* which they make in the traditional manner, not the chain or steel cable.

One great advantage of the raw hide *trektou* is that it does not attract lightning. When metal is used, a whole span of oxen may be struck dead in an instant, and the driver may be lucky to escape.

Strength is the essential quality of the *trektou*, and many precautions are taken. The old-fashioned craftsman believes in burying a wet bullock's hide in the dung of a kraal for several days. Heating due to fermentation removes the hair, but the skin is not left long enough to be damaged. Then the cutter starts work; a most difficult task if the hide is to be cut without waste into strips three inches wide. The next step is to suspend the riems from a branch of a tree with a weight at the lower end, a wagon-wheel or heavy stone.

The damp raw hide is twisted into a tight coil and all the water is squeezed out. Day after day the process is repeated until the riems become soft. But the men walking round with the wheel, with levers protruding, must make certain that the contraption does not slip from their grasp and take charge. There is enough force in the coil of raw hide to kill a man.

In the final process the riems are coated with grease and six or eight strips are plaited into the *trektou*. There remains the wagon test. Only when the *trektou* has been used with a loaded wagon, driven uphill and through sand, is the finished product regarded as ready for sale. The safety of wagon and load depend on those plaited riems. If the *trektou* breaks on a steep pass, the result may be disastrous. Riems which do not pass the test may be used for painting whip-lashes and mending harness.

Ladismith in the Little Karoo provided the Voortrekker wagon Johanna van der Merwe, the authentic *kakebeenwa* which is now

preserved in the Pretoria monument. It was found on the farm Keurbosfontein in the Hoekoe, home of the Van der Berg family, a picturesque corner full of valuable relics. They had a Cape cart there which was two centuries old, and a stinkwood plough. The Rev. Dirk van Velden, first minister at Ladismith, used the venerable Cape cart for his journeys to the Synod in Cape Town.

White settlers hired Crown land in this district before the end of the eighteenth century. It was not until 1852, however, that Balthazar Klopper (known as Oom Balter) sold fifty morgen of his farm Elandsvlei to the Dutch Reformed Church so that a village could be established. A handsome church had been built previously. Lady Smith, the Spanish wife of the Governor, Sir Harry Smith, consented to the village being named after her; and sent a gift of £10 and a Netherlands Bible. Ladysmith it remained until 1879, when it was changed to Ladismith to avoid confusion with the Ladysmith in Natal which had been

established two years earlier than Ladismith, Cape.

Oom Balter had been willing to sell his whole farm for £4,000 and the purchase of only a portion for £1,000 turned out to have been a blunder. There was not enough water for the village in the irrigation furrow during the twenty-hours a week when Oom Balter allowed it to flow. People often had to send up to the spring on Oom Balter's farm for water to drink. With this handicap to be endured, the isolated village grew slowly. After seven years there were only nineteen houses; but a quarter of a century later Ladismith consisted of one hundred houses and three hundred people.

A post-cart running to Touws River railway station was for many years Ladismith's only regular link with the outside world. It took all day to cover the distance of sixty miles, and the driver sounded a bugle to announce his arrival. As far back as the eighties of last century the people of Ladismith were promised a branch railway line, but it was not until 1925

that the first train steamed into Ladismith station. It bore a legend, in chalk: "After 44 years".

Ladismith has had its centenarians and other personalities, including a mayor, Mr. H.W. Becker, who held office continuously from 1888 to 1920. But the character Ladismith still talks about occasionally was "Pierinkje", a comic little Hollander who started work there as church-warden, teacher and catechist about a century ago. His name was Jan Pierik and his salary was £80 a year; but he was a lifelong bachelor and so he contrived to pay his way. One day a dog entered the Dutch Reformed Church at Ladismith during the morning service. Pierik stood in front of the dog and announced: *"Je word verzocht de kerk te verlaten"*. (You are requested to leave the church.) The dog did not budge, so Pierik delivered his final warning: *"Ik waarskuw je nogmaals dat op lastgeving je verzocht wordt de kerk te verlaten"*. (I warn you once again that on instructions you are requested to leave

the church.) As the dog still took no notice, Pierik marched up the aisle to the minister and reported: "*Weleerwaarde Heer, ik heb den hond verzocht de kerk te verlaten en hij weigert dit ten sterkste*". (Sir, I have requested the dog to leave the church and he has refused to the utmost.)

Pierik was leading the choir on one occasion when he chose too high a note for his capacity. The minister leaned over the pulpit and remarked quietly: "Pierinkje, old chap, you are going to commit suicide." Pierik took the hint and started again on a lower note.

Twelve miles from Ladismith, on the Oudtshoorn road, is Zoar mission, a collection of little farms which have been worked by the coloured people for nearly a century and a half. Two brothers Nel presented the original farm to the government for missionary work, and the Berlin Missionary Society started the enterprise. It was taken over by the Dutch Reformed Church towards the end of last century, and further land was secured.

Unfortunately only a fraction of the soil is fertile, there is a water shortage, and the farms are overstocked and overpopulated.

So the Zoar settlement, with a population of thirteen hundred, usually consists largely of old people and grandchildren. Many of the others go to the cities to work. Zoar's own industries include growing a green-fig harvest for the famous konfyt, and gathering bush tea from the Klein Swartberg heights. Donkeys tread out the wheat in Biblical fashion. Most families grow their own vegetables.

Youngest of the Little Karoo dorps is De Rust, which arose early this century on the farm of that name, twenty miles to the east of Oudtshoorn. De Rust was a farm at the end of the eighteenth century, and most of the travellers and transportriders knew it because they had to rest there when the rivers were in flood. Petrus Johannes Meiring, a cattle farmer, became the owner in 1832, and Meiringspoort is named after him. The first footpath through this narrow, vertical, thirteen-

mile cleft in the Swartberg was Meiring's work. You may remember that the poort is just wide enough to allow the road to run beside the river. Meiring's nickname was Blomnek, and this nickname remains on the map; for Meiring made a road over Blomnek to De Rust.

White farmers settled in the present Oudtshoorn district two centuries ago. Among the pioneers were Phillipus du Preez of Matjes Rivier (1756) and Johannes Strydom, whose farm was officially described as "Kruis Rivier over de Oliphants Rivier aan de Cango." That was in 1759, and no earlier record of the use of the name Cango has been discovered. Claas Grobbelaar arrived the following year. At the same time Hermanus Steyn occupied a farm near the Cango caves, though twenty years passed before the hidden wonders were revealed to civilized eyes.

I do not intend to lead you through the familiar Devil's Workshop and other fabulous chambers, for you know the way better than I

do, and geological spectacles never grip me for long. But there is one little-known point about these famous caves worth placing on record. Credit for being the first white visitor to the Cango caves has always been given to the farmer Van Zyl, who was supposed to have been following a wounded buck when he came upon the entrance to the vast grotto. Strange to say, this is at variance with Van Zyl's own story, which he recorded at the time.

The late Mr. J.W. ("Oubaas Johnnie") van Wassenaer, greatest of all Cango guides, always claimed that he had found Van Zyl's own notes. According to these notes, Van Zyl was anxious to find shelter for his stock, which were suffering in the bitter winter of 1780; and so he sent an old slave to search the hills. The slave returned on July 11 and declared: "Master, there is a place under a rock big enough for all the cattle to shelter all through the winter." Barend van Oppel, an old sailor, was present when the slave made his report, and he decided to visit the place. The slave

told him it was dark inside, so he took some tallow candles and rags soaked in tar. Van Oppel stopped on the brink of a drop which he thought of as a bottomless pit. Van Zyl arrived later, and his slaves lowered him on a long riem into the cavern known nowadays as Van Zyl's chamber.

"Oubaas Johnnie", who died during World War II, started work as a guide in 1880, long before there was a road to the caves or a gate at the entrance. He retired in 1928, two years before electricity had been installed; so that he belonged to the magnesium era. During his early days the veldkornet of the Congo collected fifteen shillings from each party of visitors. Anyone found trespassing in the caves had to pay a fine of four guineas.

For more than thirty years "Oubaas Johnnie" spent four nights a week exploring the caves. He knew that the caves were once the course of an underground river, and it was his ambition to discover the unknown opening where the river emerged into the sunlight

again. Never did he lose himself on these lonely and dangerous wanderings; but once he fell into chilly water after breaking two ribs, and it took him thirteen hours to struggle out again. "Oubaas Johnnie" knew those caverns in a complete black-out. His sense of direction never failed during seven thousand journeys alone. Once he reached a snow-white chamber sixteen miles from the entrance, leaving his footprints where no other human eye has yet re-discovered them. But he never found the other end of the ancient underground river.

So the caves must still hold many secrets. Geologists hope to discover fossilized animals in the unexplored dolomite passages. A burial ground of petrified bats was found some years ago. Imaginative visitors peer into the farthest recesses they are allowed to penetrate and ask themselves the same question: "What lies beyond?"

Along this valley, in rock shelters and caves littered with the bones of old feasts, the Bushmen of the Congo made their last stand.

For centuries they had lived in a Bushman's paradise; a land of flowing streams where they satisfied their great meat hunger with the flesh of elephant and hippo, kudu and eland, buffalo and zebra. The honey from which they made their beer came from the huge, wild hives on the heights. When they longed for a change of diet it was usually possible to raid the flocks of sheep owned by the Hottentots beyond the Outeniqua range.

Now there are only the paintings. In many places you can see at a glance how the Bushman artists found their subjects. One cave reveals the artist's impressions of swallows in flight, and the swallows are still nesting in the precipice above that cave. Another cave is situated below one of those enormous old hives I have mentioned; and inside is a painting of a hooded Bushman robbing the hive with angry bees attacking him. Elsewhere there is a painting of a red and yellow rainbow, with zig-zig flashes of lightning beneath it.

One day, perhaps, the Cangocaves will have a rival. Other caverns of surpassing beauty have been discovered from time to time, and it is clear that so far, no one has touched more than the fringe of a world of subterranean wonders. On the Grootkraal farm, for example, there is an underground lake. Early this century several young men lowered a small raft through a hole and launched it on the surface. They went down boldly and lit their lamp and voyaged on these eerie waters. A later expedition went farther, until the paddlers heard a rushing sound which suggested a waterfall in the darkness. Human nerves could stand no more, and the explorers hurried back to daylight. Everywhere in the Congo valley the limestone is honeycombed with the strange passages and caverns which are found only in limestone formations. Irrigation furrows have a disconcerting way of emptying suddenly. The water has gone down a newly-opened hole to the mysterious Congo underworld.

A new cavern was found in 1950 on Mr. H.S.N. Schoeman's farm Marseilles, only a mile from the

Cango caves. Here the explorers discovered unsuspected treasure in the shape of tons of bat guano, which came in useful on the tobacco lands. Not far from this spot is the stone dwelling built by slaves in 1810 for Commandant Botha, grandfather of General Louis Botha. And on the hill above the house is the cave where the old commandant found shelter for three hundred head of small stock and guarded them against Bushman raiders.

This must have been the Botha who entertained that pathetic, courageous traveller, Lieutenant James Holman, R.N. Holman had to retire from the Royal Navy at the age of twenty-five when he became completely blind. But he overcame his handicap magnificently, and went on travelling until he had visited many parts of the world. "What is the use of travelling to one who cannot see?" Holman wrote in one of his volumes. "I answer, does every traveller see all that he describes. By having things described to me on the spot I think it is possible for me to form as correct a judgment as my own sight would enable

me to do. This is the secret of the delight I derive from travelling. It may be supposed that I sustain a great disadvantage in not being able to observe the countenances of those with whom I converse; but the tone of voice, the manner and my own imagination compensate the deficiency."

Holman arrived at the Cape in 1829, and rode everywhere on horseback. Among the farmers mentioned in his book, who entertained him well, was Philip Botha, whose place was near the Cango caves. Botha had twenty children, all by one wife. The farm tutor acted as conductor while the children and three nephews sang the "Evening Hymn". Lusty children they were. Holman declared that it was done "in an uproarious manner", and referred to the children as "stentorian choristers".

Cango valley preserves the remote past. A fossilized dinosaur egg, six inches long and hard enough to baffle a baboon, was dug up in the neighbourhood. Many old walnut trees are to be seen along the Grobelaar's River, and in wartime the nuts fetched good prices. Now the walnut

cheques are small compared with the returns from lucerne and tobacco. A plant of the district, which grows wild nowhere else in South Africa as far as I know, is the liquorice plant. Some farmers seem to be unaware of its presence. Other shrewd farmers dig out the roots, which have fetched £100 a ton. Liquorice is used for medicinal purposes, of course, and for sweets.

Oudtshoorn village came into existence about a century after the district had received its first white settlers. Church services had been held on the site for some years, but the place had been known as Grobbelaar Rivier after one of the early farmers. Then, in 1847, Surveyor Ford cut up the farm Hartebeest Rivier into five hundred erven, and there was a public sale. Mr. Egbertus Bergh, magistrate of George at the time, was asked to suggest a name for the village. His wife was a descendant of Baron Van Rheede van Oudtshoorn, who died on the way to the Cape before he could take up the post of governor. Hence the name. But the George people were sarcastic about this upstart,

and they gave it a nickname which was soon forgotten - Velschoendorp.

Water was Oudtshoorn's problem for more than half a century, and for this reason the village grew slowly. In drought, water had to be brought for miles in barrels and sold to householders at sixpence a bucket. The drought of 1865 was so severe that many of the leading farmers sacrificed their land and trekked to the Transvaal. Yet in the same year Mr. Justice Watermeyer held the first Circuit Court in Oudtshoorn and noted that the early pondoks had all disappeared and the village consisted of sixty neat dwellings. The prison was among the best in the colony. There was a £13,000 church.

Oudtshoorn, with its water shortages, enriched many a country attorney taking part in countless water disputes. The great Langenhoven was at one time far better known in Oudtshoorn as an expert on the water laws than as a poet. The district also produced irrigation experts, men who taught the rest of South Africa how to make the best of slender resources with weirs, sloods and furrows.

As far back as 1882, farmers in this district were selling their land at £600 a morgen; and in that year one farmer produced 80,000 lb. of tobacco on six morgen.

Among the wonders of Oudtshoorn town, to my mind, are those lavish, ornate Victorian mansions which stand like monuments of bygone riches based on the ostrich feather. Not that Oudtshoorn is poor today. It has known fantastic prosperity and deep anguish, and the old days of ostrich wealth are unlikely to return. (If they did, the Oudtshoorn farmers would view the situation with keen suspicion.) But such country palaces as Finehurst and The Towers will never have replicas. One town house, which cost £25,000 when it was built in 1901, was sold for one-tenth of that price thirty years later. Such are the vicissitudes of Oudtshoorn.

All through the years this district has grown something which has more fascination for me than the most gorgeous ostrich feather. I refer to the muscat grapes which yield some of the finest fullbodied sweet wines in the Cape. In

the Oudtshoorn cellars you will also find light sweet hocks, flor sherries, the dry white table wine called Amaliensteiner and the peach brandy liqueur.

CHAPTER 10

KAROO OSTRICH

AFRICA'S largest bird is a conspicuous figure in the karoo story. I do not intend to describe the Oudtshoorn ostrich catastrophe again, however, for I think that everyone must have heard of the lovely feathers that fell from £50 a lb. to the price of a duster. The ostrich is a fascinating bird apart from its plumes, with a dark past which baffles the scientists.

Long ago the Roman zoologist Pliny started a fallacy that persists to this day; one of those dangerous fallacies based on the misinterpretation of a fact. Writing of the ostrich, Pliny declared: "The veriest fools they be of all others; for as high as the rest of their body is, yet if they thrust their head and neck once into any shrub or bush, and

get it hidden, they think then they are safe enough, and that no man seeth them."

It has taken the scientists about nineteen hundred years to clear up that mystery. The ostrich does not bury its head in the sand. What it does is to squat and stretch its neck and head along the ground so that it merges with its surroundings. At a distance, the body can easily be mistaken for a bush or rock. Protective colouring strengthens the illusion. The ostrich is not such a fool after all.

Firmly implanted in the ostrich is a death-feigning instinct by which it has often saved its life. Watch ostrich chicks only a few days old, and the moment anything frightens them they will crouch down exactly like their parents. You can pick up an apparently lifeless chick and it will not stir. A brood of ostrich chicks which scatters and then crouches in bushy country is almost impossible to find; the farmer must wait patiently for the chicks to gather round their parents.

Adult ostriches prefer running when startled. They can outpace any horse, but the effort is

sometimes fatal. When they fall at last they do not rise again. The adult will feign death, however, when taken by surprise in surroundings where escape is impossible.

Dr. J.E. Duerden, formerly professor of zoology at Rhodes University College, Grahamstown, made a deep study of the deathfeigning instinct and decided that it was a congenital or hereditary act on the part of ostrich chicks, performed without any previous experience and without instruction by the parent birds.

Duerden also pointed out a closely related instinct displayed by brooding or nesting ostriches. In this duty the cock and hen occupy the nest alternately, the hen by day, as a rule, and the cock by night. The greyish or dull brown feathers of the female bird harmonise closely with the surroundings by day, and the black feathers of the male by night. These habits provide a perfect example of natural selection. The wild or semi-wild ostrich sits on the look-out with its long neck erect; but on the approach of man it drops its neck and head flat on the ground. Often when searching for nests the

farmer must hide behind a distant koppie and use his field-glasses to locate the binds. "One can never be quite certain what are the factors, conscious or otherwise, which determine any action of an ostrich without becoming an ostrich oneself," Duerden warned. "The stupidity lies in our attempt at an explanation, and not in the bird itself."

Did the ostrich ever fly? Some zoologists believe that the whole tribe, the ostrich and emu and rhea, never had the power of flight. Ostrich embryos, when compared with the embryos of birds that fly, reveal no characteristics of flight. The other school of thought regards the ostrich as a degenerate bird which lost the art of flying because it had few enemies and never used its wings to escape. Every part of the wing-structure shows signs of degeneration. This is one of the problems which remains unsolved.

How many eggs does the hen ostrich lay? It took a long time to settle this simple question owing to the fact that several hens often make use of one nest. Olive Schreiner's husband, Mr. S.C.

Cronwright-Schreiner, was for nine years a karoo ostrich farmer, and he set himself the task of solving some of the mysteries of the ostrich. He found as many as one hundred and fifty eggs in and around one nest. By marking eggs, and by careful observation, Cronwright-Schreiner discovered that the hen laid one egg every other day and that the average total was fifteen eggs. (Earlier writers gave totals of from four to thirty.) Often a few eggs were found outside the nest, and according to old-fashioned belief they were laid there on purpose so that the new-born chicks from the nest would enjoy a first meal, conveniently placed, the moment they were hatched. In fact, the older birds are cannibalistic but the chicks are not. The detached eggs have simply rolled out of the shallow nest by accident.

One ancient belief which persisted until recent years was that the ostrich left her eggs to hatch out in the sun. The truth is that the eggs must be protected by the birds, or the chicks would be killed by the heat of sun and sand.

Is the ostrich polygamous? Not in the wild state, the scientists tell us. The idea of the male ostrich as a polygamous bird arose when it was observed that several females laid their eggs in the same nest. Nearly all the old natural history books printed this fallacy, and it was not until Cronwright-Schreiner's investigations at the end of last century that the truth came out. In captivity, of course, there are few cocks and many hens, and so polygamy becomes the rule. The intelligent farmer, however, finds that one hen to one nest prevents chaos when it comes to hatching the eggs.

Oudtshoorn farmers went livid soon after World War II when it was announced from Hollywood with a flourish that a professional "screwball" named Jim Moran had hatched an ostrich chick - "The first in history to be hatched by a male". This simple feat was performed time and again in Oudtshoorn during the boom period. What usually happened was that the birds would hatch twelve out of fourteen or fifteen eggs and then

abandon the nest owing to sheer boredom. The farmer, having no foster parents or Incubator available, would hear movements within the eggs and become frantic at the thought of the money he would lose. (At one time, you may remember, chicks were worth £10 apiece or more.) So the farmer took the eggs to bed with him.

General Hertzog was fond of telling the story of a sight he remembered in the yard of a karoo ostrich farmer. He saw a number of strangely immobile native women, and asked what they were doing. The farmer explained that the eggs of first-class ostriches were far too valuable to be left in camps, so he employed a special team of women to do the job in relays. Several farmers in the district were employing these foster-mothers, but with the drop in the price of feathers they were thrown out of work.

One ostrich egg holds as much nourishment as a dozen hens eggs, sometimes as much as two dozen. The weight of a good specimen is two pounds seven ounces, compared with two

ounces for an average hen's eggs. Newcomers to the Little Karoo were often challenged to eat an ostrich-egg at a sitting, with a penalty of five pounds for failure. It simply could not be done by the ordinary man. Nevertheless, the newcomer was advised that if he missed his breakfast and lunch he would manage this gigantic meal at the local hotel at sundowner time. The victim was always given the choice of fried, boiled or scrambled egg, or omelette. But the flavour was rich, and those who might have consumed the same quantity in hen's eggs were unable to go on swallowing such a cloying dish.

Hottentots and Bushmen used to bury ostrich eggs in hot ashes and stir the liquid through a small hole in the shell. It takes an hour to boil ostrich eggs hard. The modern housewife, in areas where these eggs are available, uses them mainly for cakes and custards. Probably the best breakfast dish is scrambled ostrich egg; but it is advisable to add minced onion and grated cheese. A local dish which many visitors to Oudtshoorn

have enjoyed is an ostrich egg omelette with grated ostrich biltong sprinkled over it, and served in the shell of an ostrich egg.

Fresh ostrich meat is eaten, but usually in some disguise or other. I have heard of *volstruis frikkadelletjies*, for which the flesh is boiled, minced and then made up into rissoles in the usual way. Ostrich sausages are prepared with sheep fat. You can make a good ostrich soup. Ostrich steaks are too stringy. An ostrich chick is tender enough and far better eating than the legs of adult birds. Almost everyone in South Africa has tasted ostrich biltong, the form in which the meat is usually eaten. Mile after mile of this biltong may be seen drying on the frames and wires called *stellasies* near Oudtshoorn.

Pliny praised ostrich fat as medicine. "Ostrich grease was sold for eighty sesterces the pound," he wrote, "and in truth it is much better for any use it shall be put unto than goose grease." No doubt there are some who still find curative properties in this soft, bright yellow fat, but it is more often used for saddles, harness and boots.

Pliny was not always right in his remarks about the ostrich. "A wonder this be in their nature," he declared, "that whatsoever they eat - and great devourers they be of all things without difference or choice - they digest it." Unfortunately every ostrich farmer has suffered losses as a result of items which his ostriches could not digest. One valuable bird snatched a meerschaum pipe out of the farmer's mouth and swallowed it. The pipe alone might have done no harm, but the smouldering tobacco was more than the ostrich could stand and it soon died. Cronwright-Schreiner lost a cock ostrich which followed the men putting up fences and polished off all the odd bits of wire they left behind. This bird ended its fatal meal with half a dozen brass cartridges.

Ostriches have also survived queer meals. I once found an authentic and distressing record of an ostrich that swallowed a live kitten. For a little while the kitten could be heard mewling inside the ostrich.

Sometimes the ostrich swallows a tin can or bone which sticks half way down the neck. The remedy

is to slit the neck, and the bird soon recovers from this operation.

A small tortoise is a titbit which the ostrich can manage in one gulp. Karoo tennis players are well aware of the danger of losing a ball when there are ostriches near the court. A farmer's wife once left a ruby ring on the back stoep while she was doing the washing, and an ostrich stole it. Then a serious problem arose, because three ostriches were prowling round the stoep at the time. One after another they were killed, and the ring was found in the crop of the third. Among the many peculiarities of the ostrich is its immunity to pain. They are "accident-prone to a high degree; and the late Mr. Max Rose, who farmed ostriches at Oudtshoorn for nearly sixty years, once declared that he had never known an ostrich die of natural causes. Ninety per cent, he said, died from broken legs. You have only to watch an ostrich colliding with a gate or fence at express speed to realise how these accidents occur. When they take the shock of impact on the thick breastbone they

are safe. But when two savage cocks decide to fight it out with a barbed-wire fence between them you can expect casualties. The kicks land with such vicious force that it is like listening to someone thumping a drum.

Female ostriches are subject to an unusual danger. The great, massive eggs may burst inside them, and this is often fatal.

One more mystery. How long does an ostrich live? Mr. Rose had a famous breeding bird, Klein Prins, which lived more than forty years. Their feathers lose their value after fifteen years; but I believe that barring accidents there is nothing to prevent the ostrich passing the half-century mark. Nevertheless, for the reason I have given, the maximum age of the ostrich has never been accurately determined.

It takes courage of a high order to break the neck of a *kwaai* ostrich as a coloured mother did near Calitzdorp a few years ago. She was taking food to her husband and carrying her baby on her back when the ostrich rushed up,

kicked the baby away and trampled it to death. The desperate mother saved her own life by catching the ostrich by one leg, causing it to stumble. She then struggled until she had broken its neck.

The list of people kicked to death by ostriches in South Africa is longer than you might imagine, and "tame" ostriches have been responsible for most of the fatalities. Very soon after the feather industry started you find the first names on the tragic record. Before and during the breeding season the male ostrich becomes insanely savage and treacherous. He will vent his rage on anyone and anything except his mate. Warning signs are not wanting.

First comes the booming note of defiance, the brom that sounds like the roar of a lion. The neck swells like a cobra, the ostrich spreads his wings, shakes them violently, crouches, then rises and makes his rush. Everyone on an ostrich farm knows how to deal with this situation, but it calls for steady nerves. You

face the charging ostrich like a toreador, holding a long thorn branch instead of a cloak. Thrust the thorns into the venomous face, step aside, and the bewildered ostrich is forced to close his eyes and halt.

Each male ostrich has his own domain in the camp, and the visitor who eludes one angry bird by this time-honoured method soon finds himself menaced by another. Thus it is possible to spend a morning full of thrills which are liable to become tedious by repetition.

Newcomers with theories about quelling ostriches by the power of the human eye are in real danger. One such visitor to an ostrich farm was found, after a long search, grilling on a high, blistering boulder with the hissing cock ostrich on sentry-go below. Never again did he boast that he was "not afraid of a dickey bird".

One stroke from the toe of an ostrich will rip a man's stomach open. It kicks with the strength of a horse, but the direction is forward and

downward. Even an ostrich chick has been known to break down a loose stone wall. Motor-car radiators and headlamps have been wrecked by ostriches. A railway locomotive came off better, for it was the bird that was torn to pieces. Ostriches battle senselessly and furiously among themselves, always at the risk of damaging their brittle legs. Chicks are not immune from sudden attack by older birds. For the farmer it is often a heart-breaking business, and usually the finest birds are the ones that are lost.

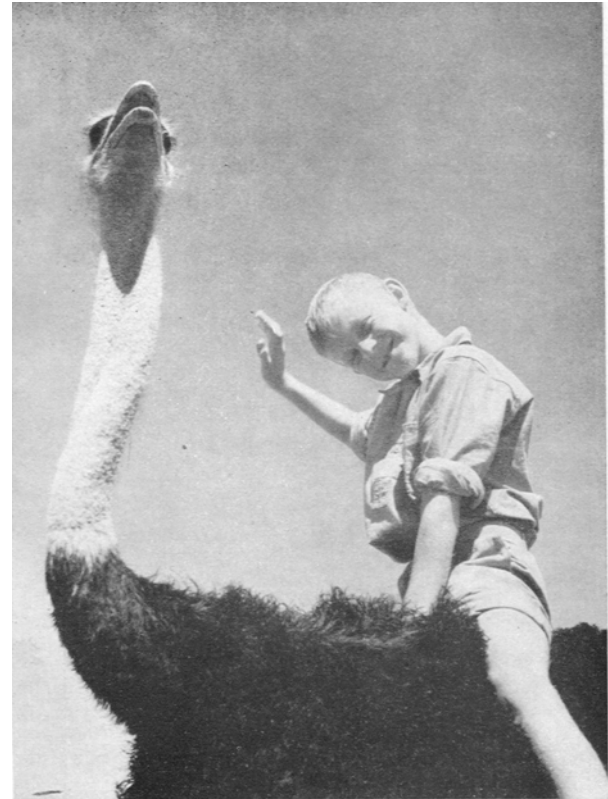
Pet ostriches are as unpredictable and as treacherous as pet baboons. One old ostrich, which had appeared for years to be completely harmless, knocked out its owner one day apparently because it failed to recognize him in a new hat. They attack coloured people more often than Europeans, and they seem to hate a horseman more than a man on foot. The spectacle of an infuriated ostrich racing beside a man on horseback, helping the horse along

from time to time with hefty kicks, would be ludicrous if it were not so dangerous.

When a cock is guarding the nest it will go into action immediately on the approach of a buck, porcupine or jackal. Farmers know that if they sit or kneel beside the nest they are immune from attack, the reason being that the ostrich does not wish to jeopardise the eggs. On such occasions the ostrich puts its head on the ground, hisses and flutters its wings.

Female ostriches are vicious only when they have chicks. Then they, too, must be treated with care. Trek-oxen are easily frightened by ostriches, and it is on record that a wagon once fell over a cliff as a result of an ostrich starting a stampede among the oxen.

Knysna was shocked many years ago when a farmer's wife, Mrs. Hendrik Barnard, was attacked by an ostrich. She lay alone on the veld for three hours and died soon after being found.



[Photo: Neville Clayton

"Africa's largest bird is a conspicuous figure in the karoo story."
(Chapter Ten.)

Twisting the ostrich's neck seems to be the best defence if you are caught without a thorn bush. A lad named Saunders of Oudtshoorn had a boy of eight with him when they were cornered by an angry *mannetjie*. Saunders seized the neck, jumped on the ostrich's back and twisted the neck until the bird became unconscious.

You can try lying flat on your face, for then the kick loses most of its force. But the ostrich will trample a prone victim, or sit on him; so that scratches and bruises are inevitable. It pays to fight back - but it is far better to hold the ostrich in check with a few thorns. Africa's largest bird is no mean adversary.

Who started the ostrich feather industry? Once it was easy to provoke a violent controversy by asking this question; it was like trying to identify the first discoverers of diamonds and gold. Van Riebeeck bought two young ostriches from the Saldanha Hottentots soon after his arrival to see whether they could be

reared. He sent ostriches as presents to Eastern potentates and the Emperor of Japan.

As far back as 1706 an English visitor, Charles Lockyer, noted that three ostriches had been sent from Cape Town to England in the man-o'-war *Oxford*, but all had died at sea. "Ostrich feathers", added Lockyer, "have become an article of export to Europe". Wild ostriches roamed within sight of Cape Town a century ago, feeding on the young wheat, and they were common on the karoos; but no attempts were made to breed from tame pairs and then pluck the feathers. It is hard to say when the fashion developed to the point where a keen demand arose for the feathers.

Solitary ostrich chicks were often kept on farms and reared as pets, but there was no thought of profit. It seems probable that the idea of ostrich farming came to South Africa from Algeria, where the first breeding experiments were carried out in the 'fifties of last century. One of the South African ostrich breeding pioneers, wrote: "The people.

constantly saw feathers sold for nearly their weight in gold, yet the idea never struck them of domesticating the bird and reaping a half-yearly crop, instead of hunting and shooting the ostrich for a single crop."

The late Senator G. G. Munnik once told me that the first South African ostrich breeder was a Mr. I. H. Booysen of the farm Klipdrift in the Graaff-Reinet district. Booysen was driving through Beaufort West in the eighteen-sixties when he met a Mr. William Kinnear, a civil servant, who gave him this advice: "Get hold of ostriches and farm with them - it is going to be one of the richest industries in South Africa."

Soon afterwards Booysen told Munnik that he had followed this advice by catching and rearing twenty-one chicks. His neighbours thought he had gone mad, and one of them asked him: "Why not farm with springbok and aasvoels, too" Nevertheless, when Booysen put his feathers on the market and received £44 a pound, orders for chicks poured in. (The order

book has been preserved by Booysen's descendants, proving his claim as a pioneer.) Booysen had shown that the domesticated ostrich feathers were superior to the wild ones.

Some authorities declare that a Mr. Arthur Douglas, a retired officer of the Royal Navy who settled in the Albany district, was the ostrich breeding pioneer. Senator Munnik insisted, however, that Douglas learnt the art from Booysen. Dr. John Atherstone of Grahamstown collaborated with Douglas in the invention of an incubator for ostrich eggs. Kinnear ranks as a pioneer, but he seems to have acted on his own shrewd prophecy some time after Booysen had put the idea into practical form.

Then there was a Mr. Charles Heathcote, who made several journeys to the Kalahari in the sixties in search of wild ostrich chicks for breeding purposes. And in 1919 there died a Mr. Jurie Gouws of Klipplaat, better known as "Jurie Volstruis"; his friends claimed that he had originated the industry. Gouws was a

hunter who sold many feathers to Arthur Douglas, who in turn exported them to his family in Scotland for disposal. It seems that Gouws was also among the early breeders.

Many fallacies had to be shattered before the farmers were convinced that breeding could be made to pay. There was a firm belief that ostriches would not lay fertile eggs in captivity. Some said the parent birds would eat all the eggs before they were hatched. And the feather brokers discouraged experiments by warning the farmers that the plumes from tame birds would fetch low prices.

Arthur Douglas deserved great credit for his early publicity campaign, in the Cape and overseas, on behalf of the ostrich farmers. One point he made was that ostrich farming offered a more secure livelihood than working a claim on the newly discovered diamond diggings. For decades he was right, until the time came at last when the ostrich feather industry received a harder blow than even the diamond market has known.

CHAPTER 11 THE KAROO BOTANISTS

*The barren earth and the burning sky,
And the blank horizon round and
round*

Spread - void of living sight or sound.

THAT was the Great Karoo as the poet Thomas Pringle and many others saw it. No doubt the weather influenced some of them. But as the days passed and the wagons rolled on, all of them must have realized that the "blank horizon" was full of life for those who stared deeply enough into the brown face of the wilderness.

Possibly the botanists were the most sensitive of all karoo travellers. The pioneer botanists, however, could not compare the ancient world of the karoo with other semi-deserts; they could not have known that this was a floral wonderland without a rival on the earth's surface. Only in our own time has Professor R. H. Compton pointed out that the karoo displays

the most varied assortment of succulents in the world. These are, of course, the typical karoo plants. They are rare (apart from the cactus) in the American semi-deserts; and in Australia they hardly exist. But in - the karoo you find the almost leafless stem succulents, euphorbias and stapelias; the leaf succulents with practically no stem, conophytums and lithops; and the succulents that disguise themselves cleverly as stones and other unpalatable oddments from the karoo landscape.

Compton has declared that no plant incapable of vigorous resistance to aridity and grazing could possibly survive karoo conditions. Grazing has always controlled the growth of karoo plants. The wild animals were there thousands of years before the Hottentots came with their fat-tailed sheep. So the plant life on the karoo, the deep-rooted shrubs, revive almost miraculously in spite of severe grazing year after year.

You cannot compare this vegetation with other semi-deserts in Africa or Australia, says

Compton. There are no affinities. But there is nothing haphazard about the karoo vegetation and flora. Long ago the old karoo selected out of the material available those elements which would fit into the karoo environment. In the northern karoo, the flora is linked with Central Africa. The Eastern Karoo, with its summer rainfall, is more like the grassveld country. In the west, a winter rainfall area, the shrubby plants resemble the coastal scrub. Cape flora is found along the southern and western borders of the karoo. In the Koup, the bleak area seen from the train between Laingsburg and Prince Albert Road, you see the most extreme forms of karoo vegetation.

The late Professor E. H. L. Schwarz of "Kalahari redemption" fame had a queer theory about the karoo flora which other scientists refused to accept. He suggested that the karoo plants had their origin and evolved near Mont aux Sources in the mountains, which are now twelve thousand feet high but which at no very distant date (according to the professor) rose to

twenty thousand feet. Then when the country dried up the plants came down, their seeds wafted by the wind. They had to wait a long time before the ground became suitable for their growth. "But as Alpine plants can grow in an English garden, so these forms could have survived, till at last the droughts cleared off the grass," Schwarz argued. "Then they descended from their lurking places and multiplied exceedingly."

Schwarz believed that the karoo was a grassy plain with running rivers only a few centuries ago. Other scientists, however, have pointed out that the Karoo flora evolved during a very long dry period. Dr. D.F. Kokot, a senior irrigation engineer who has made a special study of the karoo climate, has declared that the dominant climate must have been arid; otherwise plants as sensitive to moisture as *Hoodia* would have died out completely. It is clear from the botanical evidence that far back in geological times there occurred a period of aridity intense enough and long enough for an

immense desert flora to evolve. At no later time was there a period of high rainfall over the entire country sufficient to wipe out the desert-loving plants.

Many botanists have noted the remarkable uniformity of the vegetation, the low bushes a couple of feet high and a few feet apart, spaced as though laid out by a gardener. When you examine the bushes closely, you find great variety; a clump of five or six genera huddled together for shade and mutual support. Dr. John Hutchinson of Kew pointed out that low spiny bushes sheltered other very different fleshy plants, and sometimes a snake as well.

Between the bushes the bare soil often reveals signs of erosion. Sheep and goats keep the bare ground open. The bushes are old and gnarled; they often seem to be dead until the resurrection after the rain. In sandy soil, the widespread *driedoring* is the dominant bush, and this produces a dense covering of white flowers when the drought breaks: There is another *driedoring* species, the *wilde granaat*,

which prefers the koppies and gives out brilliant yellow flowers. *Brakbos*, another typical bush, is almost identical with the salt-bush of the Australian sheep runs. *Kersbos* burns steadily like a wax candle if lighted when green. It is often used as a torch for burning off the prickly pear thorns. Then there is the *rosyntjebos* or brandy-bush, often five feet high, with flowers like yellow stars and a fruit about the size of a pea. "Mampoer brandy" is made by crushing this fruit, adding water so that it ferments and then distilling the mixture. Long ago the karoo Bushmen used this bush for their reed flutes and their bows. The *gannabos*, with its rich green leaves, flourishes in the *brak soil*. Sheep and goats love it, and it supplies the ashes which help to make soap on the farm.

Only in the south of the karoo are trees at all common. My favourite tree of the dry regions is the *kameeldoring*, the tree I have slept beneath so often, not only in the karoo but in South West Africa and the Kalahari. For me,

this is the tree of memories. It kept my camp-fires going in far places. The reek of the smoke brings back odd corners I am unlikely to see again, and faces of friends I shall never meet again. The *kameeldoring* has the grim reputation of attracting lightning, but the pods are nourishing and you can build a wagon of this hard wood.

The *spekboom*, another valuable tree, is a succulent. In times of drought it is greedily devoured. Karee trees grow in the sandy kloofs; their trunks are often used as fencing posts, while the wood makes good charcoal. Mimosa, from the dry river beds, is another great firewood of the karoo, and the thorn branches are built up into kraal walls. You find the *wolvedoring* among the mimosa, with woodpeckers nesting in the soft trunks and eating the grubs and beetles out of the wood.

Goats eat the flowers of the aloes, but it makes the milk too bitter for the kids to drink. In spring the aloes blaze against the mountainsides with their spikes of scarlet and

orange flowers. Even some of the euphorbias, with their milky latex, serve to keep cattle alive in severe droughts. Few are poisonous.

"Botany is a science of life, and cannot be learnt fully from the dead, from the dried specimens buried in paper covers," General Smuts once declared. "All the great botanists have been naturalists, field naturalists, studying nature from life, wanderers and seekers for the precious secrets which only intimate contact with the living can disclose."

Into the Great Karoo, long ago, went the field naturalists. Among the first was one of the great ones, Dr. Carl Peter Thunberg, now called the "father of Cape botany". He was no botanical specialist, however, but a man who noted all he saw and gave future explorers the benefit of his advice. Some say he was an indiscriminate observer. However, I would not have missed the instructions this bold botanist gave for meeting a lion.

"On meeting a lion," warned Thunberg, "one ought never to run away, but stand still, pluck up courage, and look it stern in the face. If the lion lies still without wagging its tail there is no danger, but if it makes any motion with its tail then it is hungry and you are in great danger."

Thunberg never met a lion himself, I think, but he was nearly killed by a buffalo on his first journey, and he had a narrow escape from drowning in a deep hippo pool. "I penetrated every year to the more remote regions, through sandy dunes, treacherous ravines, the parched karoo, undulating plains," Thunberg wrote. "I prudently eluded ferocious tribes and beasts, and for the sake of discovering the beautiful plants of this southern Thue I joyfully ran, sweated and chilled."

Francis Masson of Kew, who travelled with Thunberg, has been mentioned earlier. He pointed out that the karoo "afforded more riches for the naturalist than perhaps any other part of the globe."

Thunberg's fellow-countryman, Andrew Sparrman, was his companion on some of his rambles. Sparrman also organized a long karoo journey of his own. One of his worries was the lack of a driver for his ox-wagon. "Had I had it in my power, I would gladly have bartered one or two of the seven sciences for the art of driving oxen," he wrote. Sparrman was not only a botanist but a doctor of medicine and professor of physics at Stockholm. He had a flair for summing up a character in a few vivid sentences. Listen to his story of his arrival at the house of the farmer Van der Spoei (Van der Spuy) and you have a perfect example of his style: "He stood stock-still in the house passage, waiting for my coming up, and then did not stir a single step to meet me, but taking me by the hand, greeted me with, *Good-day! Welcome! How are you? A glass o f wine? A pipe of tobacco? Will you eat anything?* I answered his questions in the same order as he put them, and at the same time accepted of the offer he made at the close of them. His daughter, a clever, well-behaved girl of about

twelve or fourteen years of age, set on the table a fine breast of veal, with stewed carrots for sauce; and after dinner offered me tea with so good a grace, that I hardly knew which to prefer, my entertainment or my fair attendant."

Thunberg and Masson had a companion who remained at the Cape long after they had departed. This was Johann Andreas Auge, a German who was for a quarter of a century superintendent of the Company's garden in Cape Town. (He was, in fact, the man who transformed it from a vegetable patch to a botanical garden.) Auge was also sent into the hinterland by Governor Tulbagh, and he knew the Namaqualand and karoo flora well. Now and again Auge was able to make a little money on the side by selling collections of herbs, birds and insects to strangers. One such collection was bought by the Swedish banker Grubb and studied by Professor Bergius, who described it in that rare and important work "*Plantae Capensis*". Auge himself was more discoverer than botanist.

In his old age poor Auge became blind and settled on a lonely farm, owned by a friend, in the Swellendam district. There he was visited by Lichtenstein, who found that Auge had forgotten his native tongue completely, and spoke only "the corrupted Dutch of the colonists". Lichtenstein had the pleasure of being the first to inform Auge that Thunberg had honoured him by calling a plant species *Augea Capensis* in order that future botanists might have a lasting memorial to his services. Lichtenstein, unfortunately, could not describe the plant at once, and this failure made Auge angry. The plant is a pale green, compact succulent, a typical karoo plant rather like a mesembryanthemum. Dr. John Mitchinson of Kew, during his 1928 tour, noticed it as the only living plant in the Bushmanland wilderness at a time when there had been no measurable rain for over four years. Yet this juicy succulent dominated the trackless landscape for miles.

Auge suffered another blow, second only to the loss of his eyesight. The farm where he had found shelter was raided by Kaffirs and Auge lost all his remaining plants and books. Auge lived for more than ninety years. One or two of the trees he planted have been identified by botanists in recent years in the Cape Town botanic gardens.

Lieut. William Paterson, who made four journeys during the years 1777-79, ranks high both as explorer and botanist. Among his discoveries in the Hantam mountains was the "elephant's foot" plant, later classified as *testudinaria elephantipes*. The Hottentots were eating the roots of this plant. It has always been a rarity, and nowadays it is completely protected. The plant takes half a century to reach a height of six feet. It yields cortisone or diosgenin, the valuable medicine used in the treatment of rheumatism and epilepsy.

Paterson also discovered the weird kokerboom (*Aloe dichotoma*) from which the Bushmen

and Hottentots made quivers to hold their arrows. The first scientific account of the botany of the Orange River was Paterson's work.

Francois le Vaillant, the picturesque, boastful yet intelligent French traveller of the seventeen-eighties, was a zoologist rather than botanist. Nevertheless, he sketched the euphorbias during his karoo journeys and described the kokerboom. Many later travellers attacked his narrative, and some plagiarized him. His work, judged by the standards of his period, was remarkably accurate.

A Kew gardener, James Bowie, collected karoo specimens for several years early last century. His plants and drawings are preserved at Kew. After his official mission had ended he returned to the Cape as a private collector. His lack of success was explained by a contemporary, who wrote: "His great pleasure was to spend his time among the free-and-easy company of bar-parlours, recounting apocryphal stories of his Cape travels, largely

illustrated with big snake and wildebeest adventures."

Greatest of all the old karoo travellers and botanists was William Burchell. He travelled for four years, accompanied only by Hottentots, covering more than four thousand miles and setting foot in many places where no white man had been before. He made nearly five hundred sketches, pressed and dried about fifty thousand botanical specimens, and collected two thousand kinds of seeds and hundreds of bulbs. His two-volume work on his travels is a masterpiece; according to Mendelssohn "the most valuable and accurate work on South Africa published up to the first quarter of the nineteenth century." The illustrations are beautiful, and it is hard to find a complete copy of the work to-day because so many readers broke up their books to frame the colour plates. Burchell carried out all this work "solely for the purpose of acquiring knowledge".

I would like to have travelled across the karoo in his wagon. Seldom did he cover more than twenty miles in a day; and once, when making a side-trip by horse-wagon, he recorded his distaste for speed: "We flew past every object and hardly had I turned my eyes to anything remarkable by the road side than it was already behind us. Such expedition was indeed a novelty to me, and very different from the rate to which I had been accustomed; but as a traveller desirous of observing the features and productions of a strange country I abhorred galloping horses and would have preferred sitting behind a team of my own oxen whose steady pace seemed to have been measured exactly to suit an observer and admirer of nature."

Burchell's wagon, with all equipment and two teams of oxen, cost six hundred pounds. It was fifteen feet long, with the standard measurements of the period. The covering of his wagon, however, was unusual. On a frame of bamboo were spread Hottentot mats, then

painted canvas, with sail cloth over all. He had much of value to protect from the rain, including fifty books, presents for chiefs and goods for barter, arms and ammunition and medicines. His bed was separated from this general cargo by a canvas screen.

Many people did not expect to see Burchell again when this wagon left Cape Town on its long trek. It was indeed a hazardous enterprise in 1811, though Burchell never dramatized the dangers as did Le Vaillant and others.

Near the colonial frontier Burchell once encountered two "tame" Bushmen riding oxen. One was a chief, carrying a staff of office with inscribed brass top. They were returning to their clan from Tulbagh, where they had asked the landdrost for protection against a native invasion from the east. Burchell, contrary to his expectations, found the Bushmen interesting. People had told him that they were beings "without reason or intellect". On the contrary, they seemed to him "men of lively manners and understanding".

"Just listen to Burchell's description of the vultures: "There was a heaviness in their gait and looks which made one feel halfinclined to consider them rather as beasts of prey than as feathered inhabitants of the air."

Near Prieska this observant traveller discovered a plant closely resembling the pebbles nearby. Elsewhere he found the barrier of thorns which protected another plant from browsing animals. His comments show that he was the first to establish the principle of protective colouring and form. Clearly he was a pioneer on the track which Darwin followed to the end.

It was during this journey that Burchell made the greatest zoological discovery of his life. He found the largest land animal next to the elephant - the white rhinoceros, which should be called Burchell's rhinoceros. He described and illustrated the head and horns in a communication to a French society. Wastefully, he shot ten specimens for the sake of measurements, little knowing that within a

century the white rhinoceros would become a rarity.

Burchell loved the wagon life as deeply as any trekboer. He set down his affection in phrases which were stilted yet sincere: "Nothing but breathing the air of Africa and actually walking through it and beholding its inhabitants in all the peculiarities of their movements and manners, can communicate those gratifying and literally indescribable sensations which every European traveller of feeling will experience on finding himself in the midst of so interesting a scene - a scene not merely amusing, but one which may be highly instructive for a contemplative mind."

Burchell's name has been given to the genus *Burchellia*, an ornamental evergreen with bright scarlet flowers.

A decade after Burchell came a somewhat mysterious figure, Johann Drège. His collection of South African plants was unrivalled. "His labours were enough to have

made famous half a dozen scampering travellers of the ordinary type," wrote a later botanist. Yet beyond the fact that he was a German, practically nothing is known of him. Marloth stated that Drège collected eight thousand species and two hundred thousand specimens during eight years at the Cape. Unfortunately the bulk of this huge collection was destroyed by fire in Hamburg. Drège was the first to establish the botanical regions of South Africa.

Two collectors who worked in partnership during the eighteenthirties were Karl Zeyher and Christian Ecklon. It was their misfortune to encounter the swing in popular taste from Cape plants to tropical flowers and orchids. Both felt the sting of poverty after comparatively prosperous years.

Zeyher, a trained German gardener, was also a big-game hunter. He shot an Addo elephant and killed a leopard with his knife. Zeyher made two long and successful journeys in Namaqualand; and his collection, with Dr. Karl

Pappe's plants, formed the nucleus of the South African Museum herbarium. Zeyher died during the 1858 smallpox epidemic.

Ecklon, a Danish apothecary, rambled outside Cape Town with Burchell and then went far afield. Ecklon and Zeyher sent thousands of specimens to Europe, including many living karoo succulents. The specimens were made up into sets and sold profitably. Danish scientists brought Ecklon's work to the notice of the King of Denmark, who granted Ecklon a small pension. Kiel University awarded Ecklon an honorary degree as Doctor of Philosophy.

In the eighteen-sixties Ecklon was living in a small, isolated house at the end of Sea Point, on the road to Camp's Bay. He had so many unusual plants in his garden that people called the neighbourhood Botany Bay, later corrupted to Bantry Bay. Then came the Prusso-Danish war, and Ecklon's pension was struck off. He was nearly seventy, and if old friends had not supplied him with food he would have starved. Poor old Ecklon was reduced to selling sets of

bulbs and herbal remedies. Sometimes he crept about Table Mountain and Lion's Head gathering other specimens in memory of his great collecting days. During the severe winter of 1868 two medical friends secured a bed for him at the Somerset Hospital. It is on record that they physicked him with strong soup and good wine." But it was in vain. The old botanist died there at the age of seventy-three.

Dr. Peter MacOwan bridges the gap between the old collectors and the modern scientific botanists. He came to South Africa as a young man suffering from lung trouble, and lived to seventynine. MacOwan held several important posts-director of the Cape Town botanic gardens, curator of the government herbarium and finally government botanist. He also left his mark on the karoo. For it was MacOwan who introduced the Australian salt-bush and other species which have turned hopeless brak land into valuable pasture.

Botany is heavily in debt to the amateur. You have met some of them on this karoo journey; the physicians and others who were in love with the flowers. Rudolf Marloth, author of the standard work of this century on the Cape flora, was an analytical chemist. And I cannot leave the karoo botanists without mentioning Mr. Gilbert Westacott Reynolds, the aloe specialist, who is a business man. Reynolds, author of "The Aloes of South Africa", travelled many thousands of miles to study his plants and photograph the flowers in all stages. Aloes grow almost everywhere in South Africa; their flowers may flame in midwinter; or, like the *Aloe falcata* of the Van Rhynsdorp district, become most brilliant in midsummer. Reynolds discovered thirty new species and varieties. Professor Compton declared that he made botanical history with his work. General Smuts said the book would become the masterpiece of the genus.

Rarities still linger in the recesses of the karoo and you may still come upon what the botanist Harvey called "a plant to be dreamt of rather than seen". Once it was thought that the rarest plant in the world had been discovered there, the only survivor of an extinct species.

The story opened more than a century and a half ago, when Baron von Jacquin, director of Schönbrunn near Vienna, the finest hothouse in Europe, sent two collectors to the Cape. These men, Franz Boos and Georg Scholl, arrived during the First British Occupation. They collected nearly three hundred cases of living plants within a few years; and in this collection was a weird tuberous mass one foot in length with a diameter of six inches. It was given the scientific name of *Fockea crispa*. After a century, the Schönbrunn records proved that it had grown no thicker. Every year in October it bloomed, and botanists gazed in

wonder on the grey-green flowers with small brown dots.

Fockea crispa was envied by every other botanical garden in Europe and America. It was displayed proudly at the great shows, and no other herbarium was able to match it. The karoo produced no further specimens, and so the Schönbrunn staff claimed this plant, as I have said, as the only survivor of an extinct species. When the International Botanical Congress was held in Vienna in 1905, the experts gazed in wonder on the solitary, carefully-tended *Fockea crispa*.

All this adulation stimulated the late Dr. Rudoif Marloth to seek further specimens. One year after the Vienna Congress he located a similar plant in the Sandrivier mountains near Prince Albert; but he had to wait three more years, until a season when good rains fell, to make sure of his identification. Then he went to the site again and found the plant in bloom. Undoubtedly it was *Fockea crispa*. He sent it to Schonbrunn, where it came as a shock to the

long-standing pride of the staff. However, the old root was still regarded as a great rarity and nurtured through both World Wars.

Mr. H. Herre of Stellenbosch University dealt the final blow to the romantic legend. He discovered hundreds of *Fockea crispa* plants growing near Ladismith (Cape). It was known there by its old Hottentot name of *ghwarrie-koe*. For centuries the Bushmen and Hottentots had relied on this moist root for both food and drink. On the farms and in the village, white house-wives made *konfyt* of it. Mr. Herre sent a sample of *ghwayyie-koe-konfyt* to Schönbrunn. It must have had a bitter taste for those who had cherished the karoo plant for so long, the rarest plant in the world, as they had fondly imagined.

CHAPTER 12 GOLDEN FLEECE

*We hear the Hottentot herders
As the sheep click Past to the fold.*

RUDYARD KIPLING

RARE characters, the old Hottentot shepherds. In these days of jackal-proof fencing there is less room for the shepherd's skill; but the type survives here and there on the great sheep runs of the karoo.

They are old servants indeed, sometimes the descendants of slaves who remained on the farm. They know exactly how to lead the sheep into the best veld at each season. When the shepherd cracks his old *karwats*, his short whip, the flock falls into line and wheels and bunches and obeys the order. Effortlessly he guides them into the far corners of the farm where the safe plants grow. The shepherd's dog, often a collie, is equally wise in the ways of sheep. A dash or a snarl is enough; never a bite.

Last century a good shepherd earned a pound a month and was pleased with it. He also drew rations according to the size of his family; old ewes, boer meal, salt, tobacco and untanned ox-hide for his *velskoene*. He lived in a mud-plastered hut of poles covered with melkbos when he was at home. More often than not he was miles away with his flocks.

In times of drought he shared his master's anxiety. Often the ewes were so lean when the lambs were born that their lives could be saved only by cutting the throats of thousands of newborn lambs.

During bitter winters the shepherd's life may become hazardous. It is on record that twenty shepherds perished with their flocks in the 1885 snowfalls at Beaufort West. There are times when the shepherd is sent into the high mountains that fringe the Great Karoo in search of green feeding, and then much depends on his knowledge of the kloofs and pastures, and above all the weather. Mist and snow are the shepherd's main enemies on these expeditions far above the dry plains. His

sheepdogs are his friends. Without them, he might lose his flock in the mist and spend days searching for them. But snow is a still greater menace. I have heard of a flock of five hundred sheep being frozen to death in a sudden snowstorm. The shepherd was found huddled in a shallow cave, kept just alive by the warmth of his two faithful dogs.

The late Mr. J.W. Brink once told me of a karoo shepherd who was overtaken by a blizzard on the heights. This man had a small hut within half a mile, but a deep kloof intervened and the driving snow blinded him. However, he knew of a cave close at hand and he made for it, leaving the dogs with the sheep. It was a refuge he had used before on cold nights, and he had left a heap of brushwood at the entrance. The shepherd looked forward to lighting his fire and making coffee.

A harsh growling, then low whining sounds, greeted him as he stooped to enter the cave. He looked into two glaring green eyes. Then he switched on the electric torch his master had

given him and confirmed what he had expected to see—a female leopard with cubs. Next moment he was running for his life. He spent a sleepless night in another cave, unarmed and worrying about his sheep and the prospect of a visit from the leopard and its mate. The leopards left him alone, but in the morning he found one of his dogs dead, the other seriously mauled, and a number of sheep torn to pieces. Both leopards were shot later by the farmer and the cubs were captured.

The shepherd and his collie were seen at their best along the winding trekpaths of the karoo. Those were delicate journeys, calling for much diplomacy on the part of the owner of the sheep. The custom grew up in the spacious days before fences. In those free, early times the sheep wandered across country feeding at will; and the land was so sparsely populated that it simply did not matter. Then the farms dwindled in size, and grass became valuable. Feuds started and ended in lawsuits which made legal history. A trek path is a definite

route which a farmer is entitled to follow when leading his sheep to new pastures at a time when the stock must either trek or die. Interpretation of the law, however, has enriched many a village attorney.

You may still see great treks of sheep in Bushmanland and other remote areas. On moonlight nights you may come across a huge flock on the road. If it is dark, or raining, the sheep will not move.

Goats often play the part of sheep-dogs in the karoo, though they lead the sheep instead of driving them. Who has not seen a dignified *kapater* at the head of a long procession of sheep bound for the kraal? The *kapater*, of course, is a castrated goat; and a well-trained *kapater* is the key to the easy management of sheep. When the shepherd has to take his flock across a river, the *kapater* becomes essential. First the *kapater* is guided into the stream, and the bolder sheep follow. Backwards and forwards swims the amenable *kapater* until

thousands of sheep have reached the far bank safely.

When a farmer is buying and selling sheep, the shepherd's advice is valuable. At shearing time the shepherd becomes a stern critic of any young shearer who fails to handle one of the flock properly. Shearers are coloured men who trek by donkeycart from farm to farm in the karoo, usually accompanied by their wives and families, their goats and fowls. They live in the open air, with only a bush skerm as shelter, and they like it. Put them indoors and they would probably die of pneumonia. A diet of mutton, bread and coffee keeps them in good health; and there is always a more elaborate feast in prospect when the shearing is over.

It is back-breaking work, bending over sheep all day long, so the shearers are usually small men. The scene in the shearing shed is busy and cheerful; shears clicking, the men chattering, wool classers sorting the fleece, small boys dancing on the bales to ram down the corners.

Even the huislammetjies have to undergo the ordeal of the shearing shed. These are the motherless lambs which have been brought up on the bottle by the women of the household; the very tame lambs one falls over at the kitchen door. In accordance with Cape tradition, the woman who has reared a huislammetjie receives the money for the first wool.

Modern farmers give each shearer a pen, and count the shorn sheep at the end of the day. But the old-fashioned way survives on many karoo farms. A tin is nailed to the wall of the shearing shed. Into the tin the farmer drops a number of lootjies, fragments of punched cardboard; or he may use beans if he is absolutely sure that his beans are of a type which cannot be bought at the store. After working from dawn to dusk, a good shearer may have acquired forty or fifty beans, which will be redeemed for cash. By that time he is ready for his skaapribbetjies - and any

refreshing liquid the farmer may care to contribute.

Wool was cheap early last century. A Graaff-Reinet builder designed a house with the inner walls composed of timber and reeds, and a three-inch cavity between these materials was packed with wool. This made the rooms warm and soundproof.

That builder could never have imagined the wool boom of 1950, when top grades fetched more than twelve shillings a pound. During that boom, you may remember, an eccentric karoo farmer was asked by the dorp garage proprietor to send a cheque for the new car he had ordered. The farmer disliked writing cheques. Instead, he sent his labourers round the farm to pick every scrap of wool off the fences. The bales went to the garage proprietor, who acknowledged them by telegram: "Car ready for delivery stop Wool sold stop Forwarding you £200 cash balance."

It, was a great spending spree while it lasted, a wonderful contrast with the black depression years when wool fetched three pence to sixpence a pound. Farmers put their wealth into steel barns, tractors and heavy machinery, wire-netting and wool-presses to escape some of the income tax. Many bought seaside houses. In the De Aar district a farmer ordered a £12,000 homestead and sent to Pretoria for a landscape gardener to design the grounds. That was a novelty for the karoo.

Karoo farm values rose to double the pre-war prices. Farms that were leased between the wars for a hundred pounds a year fetched thousands in rent. The value of the South African wool clip rose in a few years after World War II from fourteen to ninety millions. One farmer and his sons in the Victoria West district received a wool cheque of about £200,000 for the 1951 season. There was a time when it looked as though the Union's wool would bring in almost as much as the gold; but devaluation sent gold ahead again.

Sheep farming has its peculiar risks, and it never was an occupation for the settler without previous experience of the country. There is a reliable little book called "The Cape and its Colonists" by George Nicholson, an English settler of 1843 who learnt sheep farming the hard way.

Nicholson was persuaded to try sheep farming in the Sneeu Berg, and became owner of thirty thousand acres of mountain and plain. This cost him two thousand pounds, and it carried about five thousand sheep. He started with three thousand woolled sheep of good quality. Beasts of prey were destructive, but Nicholson recorded that they were "nothing in comparison with the predatory Hottentot herdsmen". Here, he said, the patriarchal Dutch family had an advantage over the English farmer whose children left him as soon as they were old enough to do so. The farm of an Afrikaner was sufficiently guarded by six or seven adult males who kept constant watch.

Nicholson complained of the diseases of sheep rampant in his time, the scab and violent inflammation of the lungs and intestines, and above all the droughts. He asserted that at the ruling prices of wool, sheep had never returned more than four per cent of the money put into them. Common goats, he declared, owing to the demand for skins and tallow, were a far better investment.

Stories of sheep are so plentiful that you might fall asleep counting them. Not long ago, you will remember, there was the discovery of the sheep with the "golden teeth" in the Vosburg district of the North West Cape.

It seems that the local minister was dining with the farmer. The farmer was about to plunge his fork into the chief dish, a sheep's head roasted whole, when he noticed something glittering. Probing deeper, he announced that the teeth were coated with gold. In the excitement the meal was abandoned. Rumours ran round the district. It was argued that the sheep had picked up a covering of alluvial gold while

browsing on the veld. Prospectors arrived, gold fever gripped the village and district, property values soared. Soon afterwards came the explanation. "Gold-plated" teeth, announced the experts, were fairly common among karoo sheep. The glitter was caused by tartar, deposited by the saliva in thin films. It was not gold.

A more remarkable sheep story, to my mind, was that told by a Tarkastad farmer named Pio a few years ago. There are two mountains on his farm, Martha and Maria, and both are encircled by steep *kranses*, rocky cliffs at the summits.

Pio climbed one of these three hundred foot cliffs. He went armed, for he had been tackled a short time before by a trapped baboon. There was no easy route to the top, but at last he reached the plateau. There he found six animals which he recognised with difficulty as sheep. They were like huge balls of wool. Even their eyes were almost closed by the wool, which had grown to a length of nine inches.

Next day Pio led his wife and two natives up the mountain. Mrs. Pio had to be helped up the cliff with a riem; yet the sheep had climbed unaided. The natives looked at the six monsters and said they were the ghosts of sheep. It was proved that the sheep had lived on the summit for three years. The climb was a marvel of animal ingenuity. But it was also clear that the sheep had survived all that time without water. Each sheep yielded an average of twenty-four pounds of wool. And never did sheep find the shears more welcome.

Turn over the files of any South African newspaper, search the records in the archives, and you will see how closely sheep are linked with the life of the karoo and the whole country. News of sheep sales, importations, flocks drowned in floods or killed by baboons, lightning, veld fires, drought and disease-these events are never absent from the columns of country newspapers.

Often the sheep gain a wider publicity. At Victoria West once, more than a thousand

sheep were crowded together during a thunderstorm, and one flash of lightning killed eight hundred of them. There are also the sheep records that crop up occasionally. Mr. Carl Carr took a prize at the Worcester Show in 1888 with a sheep weighing 164 pounds.

Strange cases of atavism, or reversion to the Cape sheep ancestor, occur (though rarely) among animals which appear to possess pure Merino characteristics. A lamb born at Barkly West was thought at first to have been sired by a steenbok. The long, slender legs and shape of the head, and particularly the russet brown coat, supported the theory. But the lamb was really a "throwback" to the fat-tailed wild sheep, ancestors of all the sheep in the world.

These fat-tailed native sheep impressed the first Portuguese explorers when they landed at the Cape. The lop-eared Afrikaner sheep are rather like the Persian breed, one of the oldest

in the world; leggy and light when dressed, but admirable when cooked.

The weight is in the tailfat, and one tail may weigh more than sixteen pounds. These native Afrikaner sheep have never died out. Centuries ago they provided scurvy-stricken crews with meat, while the Hottentots received tobacco and trinkets. To-day farmers still feast on them.

Sheep from the best flocks in Holland were sent to the Cape in Van Riebeeck's day, some of them only to be killed by leopards. The first laws dealing with sheep were passed seven years after Van Riebeeck's landing; now the legislation on the subject fills volumes. Fines were paid in sheep during the early period of the Dutch East India Company's rule. Spanish rams arrived as far back as 1689 to raise the grade of wool. Before the end of the seventeenth century, ships were carrying Cape wool to Holland. One writer noted: "It was very remarkable that the wool of the

Fatherland sheep, sent to the Cape, improved so perceptibly by the change of climate."

Nevertheless the farmers did not take kindly to wooled sheep. They argued that such sheep were more liable to scab; and indeed, there are many references to "brandziekte" in early documents. A placaat of 1714 dealt with sheep diseases. How many there have been since then!

The first serious attempt to breed sheep on a scientific basis appears to have been made by Colonel Gordon, who was in the Dutch Company's service in 1790. He procured a number of rams, of the fine-woolled sheep of the Escorial breed which had been presented to the Netherlands Government by the King of Spain. Some he kept for himself; others were distributed among the farmers between Cape Town and Mossel Bay. They were crossed with the hairy native sheep, producing an animal with a rough, lustreless but abundant fleece. Some of Colonel Gordon's sheep went on later to

Australia. These were among the original progenitors of Australia's millions of sheep.

Some years after receiving Colonel Gordon's sheep, Australia contributed to South Africa's flocks by sending a number of Saxon rams from Mr. Alexander Reley's estates in New South Wales. They arrived in the barque Leda in excellent condition, and a committee of experts decided that they were of greatly superior quality to anything yet imported into the Cape Colony. The wool combined weight and softness, strength, elasticity and closeness of pile. As a result, further large shipments of Saxon and Merino rams were ordered.

Yet the fat-tailed sheep continued to reign almost supreme. It was valued in the remote platteland not only for its meat and lard, but also for the shoes, jackets and trousers which could be made from the skin. Moreover, wool-washing and clipping meant hard work, and merino breeding stock cost more than many farmers could afford.

Some of the country trading firms tried to encourage wool production by gifts of merino rams to certain farmers. The tale is still told of a remote farmer who trekked into the dorp on his yearly visit with his wagons loaded with skins and other produce. He also brought a small bag of wool. The dealers decided that this was the right moment for subtle propaganda. They bid against each other for the wool, and it was knocked down to one of them for a fantastic sum. The farmer returned home with a wagon-load of rams, the story spread, and soon the whole district had been converted to wool.

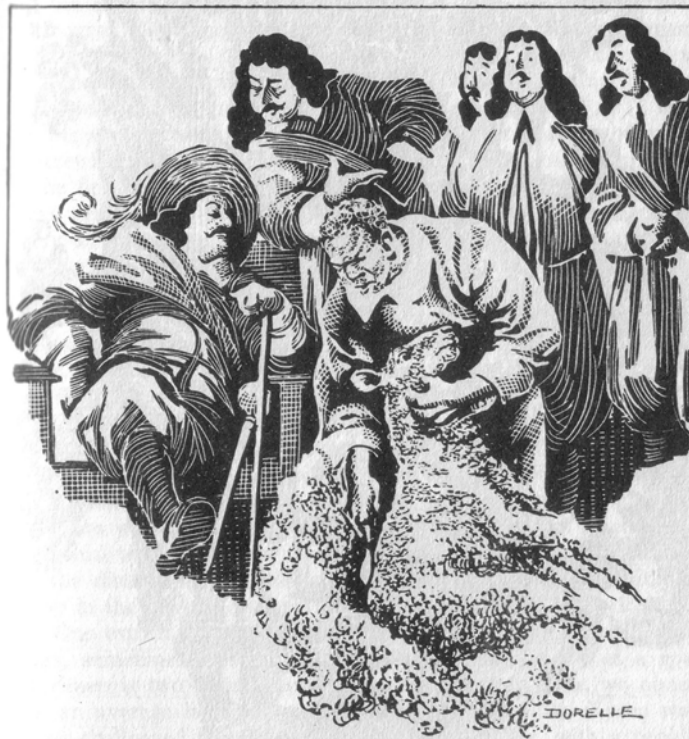
Earl Caledon, Governor of the Cape in 1808, tried to force the wool industry on the farmers. Spanish sheep were supplied free; but after two years owners of Afrikander sheep were to be heavily taxed and farm rents doubled. Passive resistance defeated this high-handed policy.

Lord Charles Somerset stocked Groote Post in the Darling district with fresh Spanish stocks. The van Reenens, van Bredas and others helped to improve the breed; and on their faith the

present enormous industry was founded. Soon after the middle of last century the value of the Cape's wool exports had passed the £1,000,000 mark. Wool, in the days of the ox-wagons, was a great sight on the country roads of the Cape.

Up to the early years of this century the sheep for Cape Town's tables arrived on the hoof, after long treks from Namaqualand and the karoo. Buyers went out by Cape cart every year in August in search of the trekboers. These trekboers, of course, had clung tenaciously to the tasty Afrikander sheep. For days they would bargain with the buyers. Then the flocks would be assembled for the southward journey, thousands of newly-branded sheep trekking together in charge of wise old Hottentots.

Many a cavalcade of sheep went over Grey's Pass in those days. Others followed the coastal route, crossed the Berg River drift at Melck's farm Kersefontein, and used the old trek path through Hopefield and Darling. The last river



"Sheep from the best flocks in Holland were sent to the Cape in Van Riebeeck's day — some of them only to be killed by leopards."
(Chapter Twelve.)

was the Diep River at Visser's Hok, within sight of Table Mountain. By that time the sheep had usually been on the road for a month; but they were in fine condition. Now the sheep speculator reaches Namaqualand in a few hours' driving, and the sheep come down by rail. Mutton chops cost sixpence a pound half a century ago. Speed has sent up the price considerably.

Sheep brought the first fences and gates to the karoo. Though the advantages of fencing were obvious, there were many opponents - like the somewhat conservative farmer who threatened at a meeting: *"Ek skiet morsdood die eerste man wat durf een gat maak op my grond vir een draad heining."* ("I'll shoot stone dead the first man who dares to make one hole on my ground for one wire fence").

Before the arrival of cheap fencing wire, the karoo farmer either had no visible boundaries or else he embarked on the staggering task of

building long stone walls. You can still see many of these century-old relics in the karoo. Some stretch for miles. They must have been started in the days of the voortrekkers and carried on by later generations of indefatigable farmers.

They had to carry the stones over long distances and place them skilfully, without the aid of mortar, so that rain would do no harm. Competitions were organised, bets were placed, and the finest wall-builder received sheep as his prize. They might have used timber, but they preferred to put up something almost as solid as the Great Wall of China. You can see walls in the karoo four feet high and more than two feet wide, stretching away into the distance. Farmers have nibbled at them when they needed stone for new farm buildings. Shale walls have fallen in many places. Yet many of the stone walls are still standing firmly after more than a century.

Galvanised wire put an end to stone walls. It first appeared in South Africa soon after the middle

of last century. The pioneer jackal-proof paddock was built by Mr. Michael Jacob van Breda of Zoetendalsvlei in the Bredasdorp district. That was in 1852, and it was also the first in the southern hemisphere. I believe the karoo pioneer of wire fencing was Mr. John Sweet Distin, who farmed in the Middelburg district. He had previously employed a gang of twelve Basutos solely on wall building. When he heard that wire was available he imported an Australian fencing expert to carry out the work. Some of that original fencing is still in use on the farm Tafelberg Hall.

Barbed wire came later. Invented by an American farmer, Joseph Glidden in 1873, this ugly essential was originally devised to keep dogs off Mrs. Glidden's flower-beds. Shipments reached the Cape in the early eighties. In August 1885 a Mr. Paterson claimed and received damages from a country town council when his clothes were torn on a municipal fence. Before the end of the century the Cape Government

Railways were fencing their lines against stray cattle and sheep.

With the wire came the first gates. Travellers who know no other Afrikaans are able to translate that all too familiar phrase: "*Maak toe die hek.*" And you must do it, too. In 1912 it became an offence to leave a gate open, or to pass through an open gate without closing it. The maximum fine is £10, and £20 for a second offence; and you may be sent to gaol for a month without the option if you have a previous conviction. Nevertheless, the magistrate usually lets the offender down lightly with a fine.

One question that often arises is the legal definition of a gate. The answer is "an iron or wooden frame spanned with wire." No doubt you have struggled with barbed-wire and pole devices which require great strength to open and close. Nevertheless, these inventions of the devil are gates in the eyes of the law. In a Supreme Court case in 1925 it was held that "any structure or contraption which can be opened and fastened and which is fixed across a road or footpath to

form a gate is a gate within the meaning of the Act."

CHAPTER 13

OUTLAWS OF THE KOPPIES

NATURALISTS have been studying the baboon for centuries, but there are karoo farmers who know more than the scientists about certain aspects of baboon life. One generation after another of the same family will carry on the endless war against one generation after another of the same pack of baboons on the same farm. The humans discuss the baboons, and there can be little doubt that the baboons pass down what they have learned about the humans, probably more than the farm people realise.

One of the loneliest karoo roads I know runs through the mealielands of an isolated farm. Long ago I drove through those mealies with an American visitor beside me. I had warned him to expect nothing but karoo, karoo, karoo ... and he had still been eager to come. That day the brown veld seemed to move suddenly.

For a second a pack of baboons, at least a hundred strong, turned and stared at the intruders. At the same moment the sentinel baboons gave the warning. With those urgent barks the whole pack crossed the road in front of my car, racing up the slope to their koppie.

They crossed the road at full gallop, tiny baboons hanging in terror beneath their mothers, small ones riding like jockeys, shaggy old fellows turning boldly in an organized rearguard action and barking as though they would menace the car. I had seen it all before, but I sat enthralled. My American friend declared it was the greatest sight of his life, worth travelling all , the way from New York to see.

Karoo farmers know the baboon only too well. More folklore, more legends have grown up round this grotesque caricature of man himself than any other beast of the veld. It seems that the Chacma baboon, the dog-faced, brown-haired pest found everywhere from the Cape to the tropics, can never live in peace with

mankind. Yet there are not many karoo koppies without a baboon population.

Kill a baboon, cut off the tail and scalp, and the government will pay you a reward which varies from time to time and from district to district according to the amount of trouble caused by baboons. For ways that are mysterious and tricks that are cruel, the baboon heads the list of destructive animals. A farmer who had hunted baboons for fifty years once confessed to me that he had never discovered where a troop made its base, how they communicated with each other, or what instinct enabled them to avoid danger.

Baboons gouge out the eyes of lambs. They tear iambs and kids open to secure the curdled milk in the stomachs. Apparently this is a new form of crime which has arisen since the extermination off the prickly pear. Full-grown sheep have been taken in some areas. Baboons attack the young of all the game animals, and wipe out guinea fowl and partridge. In half an hour a large troop of baboons will clear a field

of mealies, pumpkins or melons, throwing many a cob aside wantonly after one bite. A pack will swing on the fencing-wire of a farm and tear it down like mischievous boys. In the Little Karoo the baboons raid vineyards and apple orchards and trample down fields of wheat and lucerne.

This havoc never ends. The baboon outlaws not only survive but flourish in settled farming areas, always a menace in spite of merciless hunting. Jackals certainly take a much heavier toll of the sheep; but the widespread and indestructible baboon ranks as the greatest and most cunning enemy of many farmers.

Guns and dogs, traps, prussic acid capsules, baited cages are used every day in the war on these brigands of the veld. The baboons are thinned out but never destroyed. One farmer, desperate after heavy losses, caught a large male baboon, sheared it, painted it white with red rings round the eyes, tied a tin of pebbles round the neck and freed it in the hope that the living scarecrow would drive other baboons off

the farm. They did not stay away for long. No really effective invention for defeating the wily baboon has yet been devised.

Occasionally the *bobbejaanhok* or cage trap of wire-netting succeeds for a time. There is a trap-door held up by a wire which runs over a pulley and is attached to a weight. Mealies or pumpkins are placed inside; and the weight is adjusted so that when a baboon touches it, the door falls. De Aar district farmers became desperate when the baboons took their valuable merino and karakul sheep, and they built these traps on a large scale. In the course of time, however, the baboons learnt to lift the trap-door and walk out. Mr. J.J.W. van Zyl of Smouspoort then perfected a trap with a door so heavy that no baboon could lift it. That caught a good many raiders. In the end the observant baboons decided that it was not worth while entering any cage, no matter what the bait might be.

Traps made of double jackal-proof fencing and iron standards are used in the Graaff-Reinet

district, with oranges as bait. Forty baboons have been caught at one fall of the door in such traps, while a champion baboon hunter now counts his bag in thousands. Many of these trapped baboons have been supplied alive (at a pound a head) to the University of the Witwatersrand. Certain diseases of malnutrition run similar courses in human beings and baboons; and it has been found possible to produce gastric ulcer experimentally in baboons, thus aiding the precise study of the cure. Some tough old baboons have avoided this fate by biting through the wire-mesh and escaping from the traps.

Coloured farmers and farm labourers suffer heavily from the baboon menace, for they seldom own firearms. There are remote valleys in the Little Karoo where the baboons once almost succeeded in reducing the coloured people to a state of starvation. These people had small vegetable plots, irrigated from the Gamka and other rivers, where they grew sweet potatoes, pumpkins, beans and mealies.

If they lost their autumn crops for any reason they went hungry in winter. For this situation occurred towards the end of last century, when a farm labourer earned ten shillings a month, with rations which did not go very far in a large family.

Packs of baboons ravaged the vegetable plots while the men were at work. Sometimes the men organised baboon drives, and their dogs went boldly into holes and crannies where no man dared venture. It was a bitter struggle. Dogs are fearless when pitted against baboons; they fly at the throats of their enemies and claim many victims. But the old warrior baboons are too clever for them. They will fold a dog in their powerful arms, crushing and biting; then, with the sharp fangs still embedded in the dog they will thrust the body away from the jaws, tearing the flesh horribly. The final act, when this is possible, comes when the baboon throws his adversary over a precipice.

Old Klaas, a Hottentot baboon hunter with a great reputation, was called to the rescue of the Little Karoo farm labourers. He noticed that the most dangerous pack was led by a baboon patriarch, a cunning and destructive old fellow who could not be shot, poisoned or caught by dogs. Klaas designed a wire snare for this old warrior.

Not long afterwards a white visitor entered the valley and found the whole coloured population dancing in triumph round a tree. Tied to the tree was the baboon leader. The snare set by Klaas had worked. Now the people were gathering all their mongrels with the idea of turning them on the captive baboon and allowing them to tear it to pieces. There was some disappointment when the visitor pulled out his revolver and shot the baboon.

The system of posting sentinels during a raid on a mealie-field, which I have mentioned, reveals the deepest cunning of the baboon. You can always tell the sentinel baboon because his tail is bent in a loop, an unfailing sign of his

alertness. Acute observers declare that the warning bark he gives contains something more - the direction in which a safe retreat lies. It is significant that baboons always run directly away from danger, even though the approaching human beings cannot be seen by the main pack. A baboon sentinel who fails in his duty, it is said, is cast out of the pack as a punishment. Sometimes you meet an old baboon hunting alone, an outlaw of outlaws, like an aged 'rogue' elephant. Such baboons are dangerous, for hunger makes them desperate.

It is a pity that baboon skins have no commercial value: There will be no extermination of the baboon tribe until they are hunted profitably for their skins. Baboon skins have been tanned and used for boot "uppers"; but though they wore admirably, the leather never lost its squeak. And the flesh is so bitter that it is hard to find a native who will eat it. Some farmers maintain that leopards should be protected, as the leopard is the natural enemy

of the baboon. Leopards do stalk sleeping baboons, but their appetites are not sufficiently hearty. And the leopard does not always win. A farmer, hidden in a lonely kloof, once watched a baboon troop surround a leopard. Commands were barked out by the baboon leaders, the circle grew smaller, and soon the leopard was torn to pieces. If you examine the two-inch long eye-teeth of a warrior baboon, teeth sharp as knife blades, you will see how it was done.

Hawks and eagles have been known to carry off baby baboons. Parent baboons are always on the lookout for these enemies, and they have a special warning cry when such attacks threaten. An unusual enemy of the baboon is the python. A party of hunters once saw a baboon fall from a rocky cliff into the Orange River with a huge python coiled round its body. They were so firmly interlocked that both were drowned, but the bodies were recovered some way downstream.

As a rule, the baboon is too clever to risk death by entering the abode of man unless he is fairly sure that there are no males about. A farm foreman near Graaff-Reinet once left his house with one of the half-doors swinging open, and during his absence there was a baboon invasion. The whole pack entered the house and one of them must have closed the door by mistake. At all events the door remained firmly closed and the dozen baboons went mad with fear. They leapt on the furniture, smashed the crockery, wrecked the whole interior before one of them broke a window and let the pack out. It was a miserable homecoming for the foreman, but he was glad that his wife and children were away.

When a woman is about, of course, baboons lose their fear and become insolent. Some years ago two baboons smashed up the nurses' home, which stood apart from the hospital at a remote settlement. They had entered in search of loot, and they left the rooms with vases and chairs smashed and radio set wrecked. The most spectacular invasion in recent years occurred at

another little township. A troop of baboons two hundred strong, driven by hunger from their mountain fastnesses, suddenly raided the outskirts of the railway settlement in daylight. Within a few minutes not a live fowl was left. Only when men rushed to the spot with guns did the baboon army retreat, muttering and grunting angrily.

A lone rogue baboon nearly five feet in height broke into a church and ransacked the vestry. The same baboon killed four sheep one night on a farm in the district, ripped the door off a school and scattered the books, and broke many farmhouse windows. It was tackled by a Great Dane on one of the farms. After a short fight the dog was killed. Farmers within a radius of thirty miles gathered in an effort to end the terror, but the baboon escaped.

A wine farmer once returned home to find a troop of drunken baboons chattering and quarrelling outside his cellar. He had distilled brandy that morning and left a heap of lees to dry in the sun. The baboons had consumed the intoxicating mixture. When the farmer saw their queer antics

he laughed so much that he decided to allow them to stagger away. He said afterwards that the resemblance to some of his friends was so uncanny that he had not the heart to fire a shot.

The late Mr. Donald Bain, hunter and experienced naturalist, once offered £25 to anyone who could prove an unprovoked attack by a baboon on the open veld. This challenge was taken up by Mr. Robert H. Heugh of Uitenhage, who stated that he had found a pack of baboons raiding his mealie lands near a native hut. He heard cries of alarm, ran up, and found that the native children had taken refuge in the hut.

"The baboons saw me and one large male made straight for me, showing his teeth," declared Mr. Heugh. "I was under the impression that the baboon was merely trying to frighten me, so I stood my ground. A moment later the baboon gripped me, tore my clothes off and bit me in several places. As we rolled on the ground I seized a stone and hammered the baboon on the head. Natives came to the rescue and finally beat the baboon off with their sticks. The baboon went

off crippled. We found it dead later, with the skull fractured. I still have the skull. Dr. McPherson of Uitenhage attended to me and I still have the scars."

Bain disallowed this claim on the ground that Heugh had given provocation by approaching the baboons.

I have never had conclusive evidence of baboons killing a white man in South Africa, though a grim story told in the Robertson district suggests that such a tragedy may have occurred there., Mr. Pieter Lewis, a farmer, went for a walk in the Langeberg range and was never seen again. Someone reported that he had heard the baboons on the heights barking as though intensely excited; and he thought he heard a call for help. Search parties found no trace of the missing man.

Baboon hunting can be dangerous, of course, and some hunts have ended in tragedy. The late Mr. F. W. Fitzsimons, when he was director of the Port Elizabeth Museum, took part in a drive by a small mounted commando of farmers and natives

against the baboons. They tried to run the baboons down before they could reach the upper edge of a precipice. One native dashed headlong into the baboon pack by mistake. Next moment the native and his pony shot out over the precipice into space and were killed on the rocks far below. Close to the bodies of man and pony was a huge dead baboon.

Mr. Coetzer, a Cradock farmer, came upon baboons drinking at his dam. The pack made off, but the rearguard of five large males moved towards him. He pelted them with stones, but still they advanced. Coetzer mounted his horse and galloped away with the baboons in pursuit. Near the homestead four of the baboons turned and ran off, but the fifth baboon followed him into the house and was shot near the door. It would be hard to find a record of another attack carried out with such determination.

I believe it was a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church who recorded the experience of a party which climbed a koppie. At the summit was a krans several hundred feet high. The party had a

narrow escape when several large rocks fell among them, and the minister noticed that these rocks were being pushed over the edge of the cliff by baboons.

There is a true story of a farmer's wife out riding on horseback in a kloof infested by baboons. One bold male ran alongside the horse and then sprang up behind the woman. The strange motion puzzled the baboon, and he clung tightly to the woman while the horse bolted for home. It was a situation which would have been ludicrous but for the terror of the woman. Near the farm-house the baboon realized that he was running into danger and leapt off. Baboons never fear women, and their skill in detecting a man dressed in feminine clothing (or vice versa) has been proved again and again. Many a farmer's wife has found her stoep filled with insolent baboons when her husband has been away. They peer through windows, kill any small dogs that venture out and tear the vegetables out of the kitchen garden.

It is said that an experienced baboon can tell whether a man is carrying a stick or a gun. Fitzsimons found that he could approach a pack to within fifty yards when he went unarmed. Probably there are old baboons who have some idea of the range of a rifle. Then there is the undying tale of the baboon sentinel who can count up to two, but no further. In other words, if three baboon hunters go into the fields and one remains hidden while two walk off, the unsuspecting baboons will walk right into the trap.

Eugene Marais, one of the few Afrikaners who liked baboons, once carried out a series of experiments to test this story. He decided that the baboons watched the people of the farm carefully, until they were able to class them as harmless or dangerous. The farmer could take his whole family into the mealie field, and then hide himself and send all the others out. But until the baboons were satisfied that the farmer had gone, they would not raid the mealies.

One of the strangest encounters with the baboon ever recorded was the "baboon ride" by Mr. Hendrik Maartens of the farm Nooitgedacht near Cedarville in East Griqualand, Hendrik was sixteen at the time, a short youth but powerful. He had listened to his father telling stories of the baboons he had captured alive. His father sometimes asked him solemnly: "Hendrik, why don't you bring a live baboon home?"

Hendrik was out on horseback looking for strayed sheep when he surprised a pair of full-grown baboons which were picking up scorpions. For two hours he chased the male across broken, difficult country and finally ran him down. Hendrik leapt off his horse and gripped the baboon's tail. The baboon lunged at Hendrik's throat, then bit his left wrist. By this time Hendrik had the baboon by the throat and he held on. Then, shifting his grip, he took the baboon by the ears and held it in front of him. The baboon fought hard, wriggled and screamed, but Hendrik was determined to capture him. "*Nou bobbejaan, gaan ek en jy huistoe ry!* "

declared Hendrik, "Now baboon, you and I are going to ride home."

Hendrik kept his knees behind the baboon's shoulder-blades, and there were times when an onlooker might have thought he was really riding the baboon home. Once the baboon curled its tail round a tree; once it feigned death. Hendrik simply dragged it along until he could make it fast to a tree outside the homestead. Then he called the family out, and fainted. He had lost blood in the struggle, and he was exhausted.

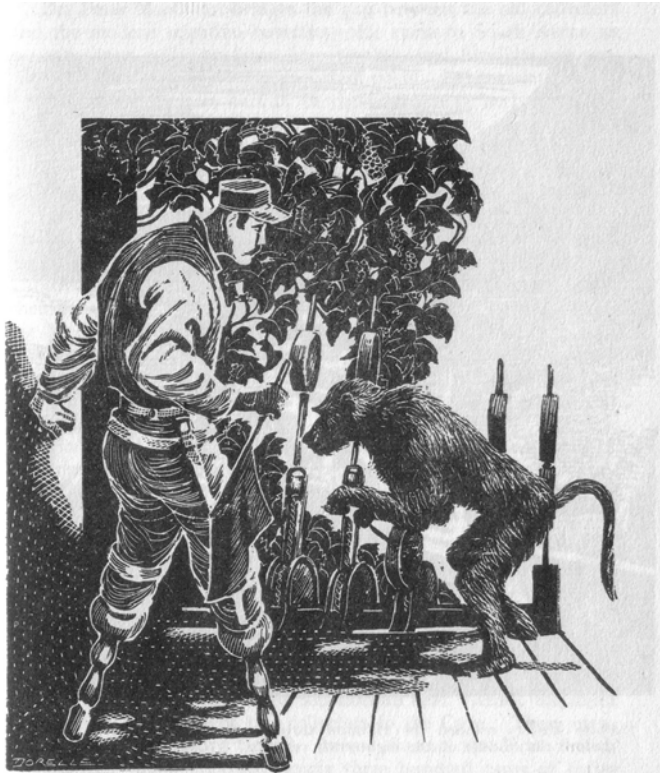
When he recovered, his father asked him why he had done such a mad thing. "Because of what you told me father-the baboons you brought home alive", Hendrik answered: "Those were baby baboons," declared his father.

Some say that baboons mate for life. Hendrik's baboon was put on a chain; and every night the female called from the heights and the male answered with a deep roar. The ending was

sad. After years of captivity the male escaped, the chain still fastened to the strong leather belt round its waist. Hendrik went out in search of it, and some days later he discovered the female hovering round a deep cleft in the rocks. The chain had hooked round a tree in such a way that the baboons had been unable to free it, and the male baboon had died of thirst and starvation.

It is now fairly clear that the baboon is mature at four or five years and lives about fifteen years in the wild state. Secure in captivity, a zoo baboon once reached the age of forty-five.

Scully the poet, usually a most reliable observer of wild life, declared that he knew one undoubted case of a baboon, shot during a hunt, that, weighed two hundred and fifty pounds. Now the normal weight of a large male seldom exceeds one hundred pounds. In the Langkloof near George there appears to be



"Finally the time came when 'Jumper' Wide was able to entrust the signal levers to the baboon." (Chapter Thirteen.)

an abnormally heavy race of baboons, however, and one of these, weighed by Mr. Dennis Munro a few years ago, showed one hundred and eighty five pounds on the farm scale. Such an old *skelm* may have eye-teeth jutting out three inches from the gums.

White baboons have been captured, and a reddish baboon was seen by motorists in Bosluiskloef near Prince Albert ten years ago. There is a yellow baboon in Rhodesia.

A rarity in baboon-infested districts is a baboon skeleton. I do not suggest that the baboons bury their dead; but the skeletons seem to vanish in a way that is reminiscent of the legendary graveyard of the elephants. And I recall Mr. L.D.J. Pienaar of Beaufort West pointing out that he had a large pack of baboons on his farm, but that in thirty years he had never found a skeleton. He mentioned the fact that the baboons carry off their wounded, if they get the chance, after a brush with the farmer. What happens to the dead baboons?

Baboons fear snakes more than any other living creature, certainly far more than they fear human beings. If you tease them with a rubber imitation snake they soon discover the trick and go mad with rage. A dead snake, on the other hand, causes extreme terror. One owner of a pet baboon slung a dead yellow cobra round the baboon's neck. The baboon died of fright.

A farmer stalked a party of baboons in a watermelon patch. To his surprise, he was able to come right up to them without the alarm being raised. Then he saw that the baboons were grouped in a circle and staring as though hypnotised at something on the ground. Only when he fired a shot did they disperse. Then he saw two dead baboons, a female and her baby; and close by a cobra was still twitching in its death agony. The snake must have bitten the little baboon. Then the baboon mother had attacked the cobra and killed it-but not before she had received a fatal bite.

Baboons have also learnt to avoid the red-hot sting of the scorpion. Nevertheless, the scorpion is a favourite item of food; so the baboon can be seen turning over the stones in search of scorpions, and trembling nervously whenever they find one. The baboon's sense of smell is poor, but it has first-class eyesight.

A baboon mother with young presents a human spectacle indeed. She will wash her offspring in a mountain pool just as a baby is bathed, and put it across her knee and spank it if there is the slightest sign of naughtiness. Baboons have also been seen using a small stick for the purpose.

It is really no wonder that baboons turn into brigands raiding farms, for their dry, rock-strewn koppies often fail to provide enough food. They love honey, climb precipices like Bushmen to reach the wild hives, and risk the anger of the bees when they plunge their arms into the huge combs. They know all the edible bulbs, roots, herbs, flowers and gums, bark and

berries. Every baboon pack has its own feeding grounds, and trespassers are roughly handled.

Baboons which live near the sea have discovered the virtues of shellfish. But the appetite of a baboon is never satisfied. A Graaff-Reinet farmer surprised a full-grown male baboon in the act of drinking milk straight from a cow's udder. On another farm, the foreman was in the habit of feeding the pigs at noon and then going off to his own lunch. The baboons noted this time-table and made their plans. One day the foreman heard the pigs screaming, and hurried back to find the baboons riding the pigs, pinching them cruelly and, of course, stealing their food.

Visitors to karoo farms are often puzzled when they find that the farmer and his family have made a pet of their main enemy. The baboon on a little platform at the top of a pole was, indeed, one of the familiar sights of South Africa before a law was passed a few years ago

which makes it necessary to secure a permit before wild animals may be kept as pets.

Some chained baboons are made vicious by teasing, bad feeding and lack of exercise. Almost inevitably there comes a day when such baboons reveal their treacherous instincts, and many tales of attacks and other escapades of pet baboons are told. On a Harrismith farm a Mr. de Wet du Plessis kept a baboon that weighed nearly one hundred and fifty pounds. This pet appeared to be tame, except in the presence of dogs. The baboon would simulate friendship until the dog came within its grasp; then it would carry the victim to a cliff near the homestead and hurl it to death. Several sheep were destroyed by the baboon in the same way, but Mr. du Plessis allowed his pet to live. He took the baboon for a walk one day and was passing the edge of a cliff when the baboon suddenly seized him and tried to force him over the edge. Mr. du Plessis fought for his life, hitting and kicking the baboon and receiving a number of severe bites. He was

being driven mercilessly towards the brink of the cliff, and was growing weaker when he put all his remaining strength into a last blow. It landed on the baboon's jaw and ended the attack. After that episode the baboon was shot.

Pet baboons have often stolen babies from their cradles, sometimes playfully, but also on occasion as an act of revenge. There was once a pet baboon Adonis which formed the habit of vaulting over the half-door into the kitchen when the native cook girl was out. Adonis would then throw all the pots and pans off the stove in the effort to find his favourite delicacy, boiled potatoes. One day the maid caught Adonis in the act and punished him by pouring a pot of almost boiling water over him.

Adonis leapt up his pole, licked his wounds and bided his time. Six weeks later the girl left her young baby asleep in a box on the kitchen floor. When she returned Adonis had climbed his pole with the baby and was shaking and pinching the child with the clear motive of frightening the mother.

Soon everyone on the farm gathered round the pole while the farmer made a plan. Mattresses were heaped on the ground. Then everyone, including the frantic mother, retired into the house and watched. Adonis tired of his game without an audience, slid down the pole and put the baby back into its box. The angry farmer waited until Adonis had climbed his pole again, and then took careful aim. That was the end of one pet baboon's career.

The late Oom Abraham Basson, who was Paarl's oldest resident, ninety-six years of age at the time of his death some years ago, was stolen from his cradle by a pet baboon. He was about three months old when this adventure occurred. His mother had left the cradle in the open air, and when she returned young Abraham had vanished. A frantic search revealed the baby in the baboon's arms on a gable of the house. Not until a favourite sweet was offered did the baboon place the baby on the roof and clamber down. The rescue was carried out hurriedly, for little Abraham was in danger of rolling off on to the ground.

Scully put it on record that he had watched a baboon carrying trays of drinks to the guests in an hotel. He had also seen a baboon shepherd. Mr. Kalman Kittenberger, a professional hunter, claimed to have trained a baboon as gun-bearer, a daring procedure when you come to think of all that is involved. I have also heard of a farmer who took three tame baboons to his lands, pulled up a weed, and handed it over to the baboons for inspection. After he had repeated the process for a little while, the baboons followed his example. They tugged at the most difficult roots until they had eradicated them, and the farmer told his friends that one of his baboon labourers was equal to three natives.

Professor S. Zuckerman has said that there was a time before the advent of man when the simple pattern of the baboon world probably represented the highest level of social evolution attained by any mammals. Today the trained chimpanzee is regarded by some as the most intelligent of the primates. Let me prove to you that the baboon is not so far behind.

South Africa's most famous trained baboon, one which always remained faithful to his master, was Jack the Signaller. The story would be incredible without the photographs and the evidence of people who saw Jack at work year after year. I believe the first report of Jack's achievements appeared in a paragraph which I found in the "Cape Argus" dated April 2 1884. "Passengers who reach Uitenhage by train are very frequently spectators of a sight that would have gladdened the heart of Professor Darwin," ran the report. "The signaller at the station lost both legs in an accident. He then trained the baboon to help him. The baboon pushes his master on a trolley and performs sundry offices for him with the fidelity of a Man Friday. The baboon works the lever to set the signals with an imitation of humanity which is as wonderful as it is ludicrous. He puts down the lever, looks round to see if the signal is up, and then gravely watches the train approach. The signaller watches Jack ready to rectify a mistake."

There was no exaggeration in this report; in fact it told only part of the story. James Edwin Wide, nicknamed "Jumper", a guard on the old Cape Government Railways, was swinging himself from truck to truck along a moving train when he fell on to the metals. As a result, he lost both legs at the knees. Thus crippled in 1877, he took a post as signalman.

About three years later Wide was in the Uitenhage market place when an ox-wagon came in with a large young baboon acting as *voorloper*. The owner told Wide that the baboon had been caught as a baby and was unusually intelligent. This gave Wide an idea. His cottage was half a mile from the signal-box, and he had found the walk so difficult on two wooden legs that he had made himself a light trolley propelled by hand apparatus. Wide decided to buy the baboon so that it could push the trolley.

Jack the baboon soon mastered this simple task. Moreover, he learnt to lift the light trolley on and off the track. He could also

"manhandle" the condemned railway sleepers which Wide used as fuel, tumbling them over and over from the dump to the kitchen door.

Wide kept an important key in his signal-box. It unlocked the points that enabled locomotive drivers to reach the coalsheds. Whenever a driver wanted it he gave four blasts on his whistle and Wide would totter out on his crutches and hold up the key. Jack watched this performance for a few days, then raced out with the key as soon as he heard the four blasts.

Finally the time came when "Jumper" Wide was able to entrust the signal levers to the baboon. In the end, the baboon needed no instructions from its master. Jack really knew which lever to operate for each approaching train. It was not an intricate system at Uitenhage in those days, of course, but the spectacle of a baboon responding correctly to every train whistle was never forgotten by those who watched.

Inevitably there were complaints from nervous railway passengers, and the system manager ordered an official investigation. Jack came out of it without a stain on his skill. Furthermore, the railway administration accepted him as a regular employee and put him on rations like the apes of Gibraltar.

Jack's rations consisted largely of vegetables and fruit. He ate candles as a special treat, and thoroughly enjoyed his daily tot of brandy. His only serious failing was the well-known baboon trait of jealousy; and if Wide fondled a dog, Jack's mood became extremely menacing.

At the cottage, Jack worked the water pump, carried off rubbish, and performed simple tasks in the kitchen. He also acted as "watch-dog", admitting friends and frightening tramps out of their wits. Jack always locked the door when he and his master left the cottage.

Jack, like other pet baboons, contracted tuberculosis and died in 1890. His master was inconsolable. Years afterwards, when telling the

story of his pet to Fitzsimons of the Port Elizabeth Museum, poor Wide broke down and wept. Wide declared that his years with Jack were the happiest of his life. Wide's grandson, Mr. A.J. Havers, has stated that his grandfather had intended to cure and stuff the baboon's skin, but he left it too long and the skin went bad. Jack's skull, however, is an exhibit at the Albany Museum, Grahamstown.

Fitzsimons knew that doubt would be cast on the extraordinary career of the baboon signalman, so he took steps to preserve the proof. In his museum he placed photographs of Jack on duty, and written statements by twenty-five Uitenhage residents confirming every detail of the baboon's achievements.

South Africa has many tales of "baboon boys" and other Tarzans in real life. False or true? I hate to disturb a romantic legend, but these queer stories never convince me. South Africa's most famous story of feral man is that of Luke, the

"baboon boy", who died on the farm Thornhill in the Bathurst district six years ago. Such an authority as Professor Raymond Dart once gave his verdict in favour of Luke; yet a later scientific investigation revealed a very different picture.

Luke was first brought to light, in all good faith, by the late Mrs. Ethelreda Lewis, the writer. She met him on the farm Thornhill in 1928 and published the undying tale. According to local gossip, Luke, as a baby, had been stolen from his native mother by a pack of baboons. About ten years later (in 1904) two mounted policemen were on patrol in the Koonap district when they encountered a pack of baboons and opened fire with their revolvers. In the rear of the pack the troopers saw a limping figure. They hurried towards it, expecting to find a wounded baboon. Instead they found a snarling native boy, naked and covered with scars and scratches. The boy resisted furiously, but the police took him with them.

In the weeks that followed Luke grew docile. He was taken from kraal to kraal in the hope that

some native mother would recognise him; but all efforts failed. At last he was sent to a Grahamstown mental hospital. Luke grunted and barked, but could not talk. He displayed a huge appetite and a decided preference for uncooked foods. At the end of a year he had lost all fear of human beings and had learnt to walk erect. The doctors classified him as a Xhosa-Hottentot mixture.

Mr. George Smith, the Thornhill farmer, then offered to "adopt" Luke; and on the farm Luke spent many happy years. In the course of time he even picked up a little English. It was a hard task, training Luke as a farm labourer, but Smith succeeded. Luke was powerful. He could lift heavy grain sacks and chop more wood than any other man on the farm. Many visitors called to see Luke and hear of his life with the baboons. A small charge was made. The freak was exhibited for profit, and the Tarzan legend became more vivid year after year.

Luke was never very lucid in his speech, but he often tapped a deep scar on his forehead and declared: "Big bird kick me." That encounter with an ostrich was his whole past. Doctors found that one of his legs had been broken and had set almost perfectly. Of this Luke remembered nothing.

No one seems to have questioned the story until 1939, when Dr. J.A. van Heerden, a Cape Town mental specialist, started a scientific investigation. First he discovered that the police records contained nothing about an incident which the troopers should have reported in writing. The mental hospital records also shed no light on the baboon story.

A police statement taken from Luke in 1939 reads (somewhat ludicrously) as follows : "I am an employee of Mrs. G. Smith. I can only recall a few incidents of my life among the baboons. My food consisted mainly of crickets, ostrich eggs, prickly pears, green mealies and wild honey. I was kicked on the head by an ostrich while raiding its nest and was, often

stung by bees while robbing their hives. I fell over a krans while busy searching for food and broke my left leg. While with the baboons I walked on all fours and slept in the bush entirely naked. I was busy hunting for food one day with my baboon companions when two policemen shot at us with revolvers. I tried very hard to escape but I was captured and carried away on a horse by one of the policemen. I cannot recall the place or district in which the police found me."

After studying this remarkable document Dr. van Heerden went to the farm with Dr. Drury of Grahamstown and examined Luke. "From the beginning I was doubtful about baboons carrying off a human baby and rearing it," Dr. van Heerden told me. "I was brought up on a farm where we kept baboons as pets. I know their habits. A native baby would be fairly heavy to carry. Baboons dislike the odour of natives. And if the baby had been carried off, it would probably have been torn to pieces by jealous young baboons. When I went to the

"More folklore, more legends have grown up round this grotesque caricature of man himself than any other beast of the veld." (*Chapter Thirteen.*)



farm I was not surprised to find that Luke was a low-grade imbecile. His own evidence was worthless. The whole thing appears to have started as a joke and it was perpetuated for profit. The alleged kidnapping by baboons goes back to 1904 and there it not a scrap of first-hand evidence to support it. As a result of this investigation, Professor Dart wrote a scientific paper refuting his previous verdict."

So I accept this verdict and reject the "baboon boy". No doubt the story became distorted at the point where the police troopers picked up the imbecile boy on the veld. Probably there was a pack of baboons in the neighbourhood, and by sheer imagination the boy became linked with them.

There is scarcely a baboon-infested area in South-Africa or Rhodesia without its "baboon boy" legend. But never has careful investigation revealed a genuine Tarzan. However, if you reverse the situation, you will have no difficulty in finding examples of baby baboons in human families. Fitzsimons once

told me of an uneducated white woman who lost her baby a few days after birth. A neighbour gave her a tiny baboon which had just been brought in by a party of hunters. For months the woman nursed the little baboon. Fitzsimons asked her whether she would sell the creature for his museum. "Sell my little darling," she cried angrily. "Never! Not for a thousand pounds!"

CHAPTER 14

MORE OUTLAWS

"NYAH-H-H-H-YAH-YAH-YAH" When the farmer hears that howl in the night he knows that a jackal is calling others of his tribe to a kill.

Within living memory the Cape Hunt went in full cry after jackals within sight of Cape Town. Now the jackal has been driven into the karoos and the mountains. In spite of a century of hunting and the intensive campaigns of the past fifty years, no one has proved that the jackal species is diminishing. Thanks to an ample diet

of mutton, there may even be more jackals than ever before.

Long ago the Jackal served a useful purpose. It followed the lion and the leopard and finished their scraps, leaving the veld clean. When the first stock farmer pushed into the Great Karoo they regarded the great cats as their main enemies. When the lions vanished, carrion became scarce. And so the jackals began feasting on sheep. It has been a long and luscious feast, and by now the losses of the sheep farmers run into millions.

When I speak of the jackal I mean the killer, the black-backed jackal (*Canis mesomelas*), commonly known in Afrikaans as the *rooi-jakkals* but also known as the *blourugjakkals*, *grootjakkals*, *vos* or *vossie*. This criminal is about the size of a large English fox and is, in fact, a fox. In shape, stride and behaviour it reveals itself as Reynard's close relative. Only the colour is different. Flanks and limbs certainly have a rufous tan, but the back is so dark that it seems to be carrying a black saddle-

cloth with silvery hairs. It has large ears, a slender muzzle and a most acute sense of smell. If it had to rely on eyesight to escape its hunters, the whole species would have been dead many years ago.

Comparatively harmless animals which are often classed with the black-backed jackal are the silverfox, Delelande's fox and the aardwolf or *maanhaarjakkals*. These do little or no damage, preferring mice and insects to sheep.

The killer jackals of the karoo regions eat more mutton in a year than do the people of any South African city. They destroy more than two hundred thousand sheep every year, worth something like half a million pounds when you consider not only the capital loss but the wool. Farmers are forced by the jackal menace to kraal their sheep at night. On the way to the kraals the sheep trample down the veld and form paths which cause soil erosion. In the close contact of the kraals there is a greater risk of diseases spreading.

If the jackal sought its meat like the lion, and killed only enough to satisfy its hunger, the farmer might be more philosophic about the pest. But the jackal, having eaten its fill, takes a delight in maiming the flock by biting off noses and lips. Thus dozens of sheep and lambs may have to be destroyed next day. Carnivorous by nature, the jackal will also feed on dassies, rats and mice, birds and hares and small buck. It will attack a young ostrich, and roll ostrich eggs against a stone to reach the contents. A jackal has succeeded in killing a year-old calf, while a pack of jackals will tackle a cow. Failing meat, the jackal will eat herbs and berries, fruit, grapes, watermelons and prickly pears. It has been seen eating stranded fish, and it will not turn up its nose at a lizard or tortoise.

Much has been made of the cowardice of the jackal, but it remains to be proved that it is cowardice and not cunning. There is evidence that a jackal will not attack a sheep face to face; and ewes have protected their lambs in

this way. Jackals have been seen trying to frighten the sheep into retreating by making sham charges and howling. Once a sheep is on the run the jackal makes short work of it by sinking its fangs into the neck behind the ear.

Some observers declare that they have seen lambs running towards a jackal, thinking it was their mother. The jackal rushed off in sudden fright and took refuge in an antbear hole, where it was found and killed.

The jackal, of course, knows very well that it is no match for a dog of its own size. It can outpace horses and dogs and scale a koppie or mountain at full speed. When it goes to earth the dogs may succeed in reaching and finishing it; but sometimes the mouth of the burrow is too small for the dogs and dynamite must be used. Even dynamite is useless when the jackal has its lair far underground. I once heard of a party of farmers who became desperate when they cornered a notorious jackal in a deep burrow and were unable to reach it. After a long wait they caught a meercat, tied a stick of

dynamite round its neck, lit the fuse and placed it in the burrow. It went down, mad with terror, to where the jackal was hiding. The explosion made huge boulders on the surface sag, and everyone thought that the jackal had paid the penalty at last. Next moment the jackal, a vixen with a young pup in her mouth, darted out of the burrow into the midst of the men and dogs. That was fatal, for the dogs tore her to pieces.

Jackals when infested with fleas have a trick which is also known to the foxes. They will collect a mouthful of wool from fences and bushes and then stand in a pool of water. Gradually they allow themselves to sink, tail first, until only the jaws and the wool are visible. By this time the fleas have all taken refuge in the wool. Then the jackal lets go of the wool and swims quickly away out of reach of the fleas. Sometimes a piece of wood is used instead of wool.

A jackal will run and swim down a stream for miles to obliterate its scent. When hotly

pursued, it has been known to hide under water with only the tip of the nose above the surface. Cunning as a jackal, they say, and there are many stories to prove it. No animal feigns death with greater realism, and then comes to life again more quickly in the race for safety. There is usually a back-door to the jackal's earth. The jackal mother never stays with her pups after the first few days; but as soon as they are able to move on their own feet she transfers them to a hole (often a meercat hole) with an entrance just large enough for the pups to enter. When she comes at night to feed them, they crawl out. If the hole is visited by a man or dangerous animal, the mother scents the intruder and removes her pups, one by one, by day or by night, to a place of greater safety. This may be miles away, but she does not rest until the last pup has been transferred. Young jackals soon learn to hide in side-burrows, pulling down the earth behind them, so that only the most experienced dog is able to find them.

When the pups are old enough to eat meat, the mother disgorges the meat for them. Naturalists believe that only the female jackal possesses this knack of bringing up meat for the litter; and owing to her power of easy vomiting, she is able to reject poisoned meat before it has taken effect. It is a fact that very few female jackals are caught with poison.

Jackals cover long distances at night, possibly as much as fifty miles during the dark hours. Proof of one long run was found in the stomach, in the shape of grapes, when a jackal was shot dead. The nearest vineyard was twenty-five miles away, on the far side of a range of mountains.

As a rule the jackal is a lone hunter. Mating pairs are seen together, of course or a female with her young. More rarely, a pack of three to five jackals may hunt together. Many a man has been bitten by trapped, wounded or cornered jackals. A deliberate attack by a jackal on a human adult has still to be reported.

Many farmers declare that the jackal cannot be tamed. You may find a jackal kept as a pet here and there; but I think the owners would all admit that such jackals never become as tame as dogs. Sooner or later most of them hear the call of the wild and slink away.

I once heard of a jackal pup, captured in the Prince Albert district, which was suckled by a cat. At eight months it played with the children of the farm and become friendly with a collie. This jackal never bit anyone. Some-jackal hunters and farmers have tried to train jackals to hunt their own species; and the crossing of jackals and greyhounds has also been attempted for the same purpose. Such experiments have never given the slightest promise of solving the jackal problem.

Dogs have been found reluctant to kill a female jackal. The only certain way to overcome this difficulty is to train bitches for the hunt; they show no inclination to spare their own sex among the jackals.

One farmer used a young jackal to train his hounds and reached the point where the jackal was sent off and the dogs were put on its tracks. After a time the baying of the hounds ceased and the farmer set out to see what had happened. He found the whole party returning home happily, the jackal gambolling with the dogs. It seems that a coloured servant, to save trouble, had been feeding the jackal with the dogs for weeks, and so they had become good friends.

The late Mr. J.S. van Pletsen, one of the leading amateur naturalists of his day, reared a jackal pup which had been caught two days after birth. It was given to a bitch which had just had puppies; and after a suitable interval Van Pletsen removed two of the puppies, fed them with the jackal, and allowed them to grow up together. He found that the jackal developed in intelligence at a much greater rate than the puppies. It went about silently, learning the meaning of everything, finding out where there might be danger, looking for escape routes.

The jackal played with the puppies when Van Pletsen was watching. Once he was out of sight the play became a bullying game. The puppies dared not approach the dish of food until the jackal had eaten its fill.

Like all jackals, this pet never knew when it had eaten enough. It became gross with fat, yet it killed fowls, raided the pantry and took the mice out of the mouths of the farm cats. Van Pletsen was thinking of giving the jackal to a zoo when the problem was solved for him. One night at dusk there came the call of a jackal roaming on the mountain. With a snarl the pet stood up on the stoep, every hair bristling, every sinew quivering. Soon afterwards it leapt over the yard fence and raced away to the heights. Two days later it was shot by a mounted constable on patrol.

Jackals have few friends, but porcupines and jackal pups are sometimes found in the same burrow. One farmer who dug out this odd assortment observed that the pups cowered behind the porcupines when attacked by dogs,

and the porcupines defended them. It has been suggested that these animals are allies. Porcupines and antbears pierce the jackal-proof fences, and the jackals bring back the meat.

"Nyah-h-h-h-yah-yah-yah." That is the assembly call, as I said in the beginning. Perhaps the most characteristic night sound in the karoo districts where jackals still flourish is the ordinary hunting call, a shrill *"yaaa-ya-ya-ya."*

The mating call is more romantic than some of the jackal's cries; for the male gives a deep, throaty howl while the female responds with a sound like a hearty laugh on a higher note. When alarmed, the jackal yelps like a dog. In a tight corner it grunts, quacks and cackles. The warning note is a *"hauch"*, or a *"wuff"* if the pups are involved. An angry jackal *"keckers"* like a fox. The young whine very much like puppy-dogs. If a pair of jackals call when the sun goes down at the same place for several evenings in succession, the farmer can be sure that a new litter has arrived.

I am told that some of South Africa's expert jackal hunters depend to a large extent on their ears. They understand the jackal language, they hear the special call of the female when she visits her pups, and so they locate the burrows. When you know the peculiar, low-toned "home shout" of the female, then you are on the way to exterminating a whole family. Not many hunters, unfortunately, are able to use such subtle methods.

Are the vermin clubs really exterminating the jackals with their packs of trained hounds? It is hard to say, though there is some truth in the view that they are simply causing the jackals to migrate to safer districts. Records of "kills", when you consider the thousands of dogs employed, are not impressive.

Years ago all the farmers of a jackal-infested district banded themselves together to rid themselves of this vermin once and for all. On the appointed day a commando of six hundred men set out on horseback. They had rifles, shotguns and dynamite, and they were

accompanied by an army of dogs. All of them slept on the veld that night and went on with the chase next day. The total bag was nine jackals, and one farmer, was wounded by a charge of buckshot in the rear.

English fox hounds have been trained to hunt jackals with some success, and a pack of thirty owned by a Paarl farmer, Mr. D.H. Smith and his son Mr. L.J. Smith, have become famous. Some time ago it was stated that these dogs were earning £1,000 a year for their owners. They are taken by road to the scene of the hunt. In distant areas, with unfamiliar vegetation, the dogs ignore the scents of other animals and concentrate on jackals. Dogs owned by the Smiths killed a thousand jackals in fifteen years. The fox hound, having found its jackal, invariably snaps the backbone with one quick bite.

There is no doubt that the professional jackal hunter often secures results when the farmer has failed on his own land. Jan Elom of George, a coloured hunter who is well-known

in the Great Karoo and Little Karoo, must have killed fifteen hundred jackals during his thirty years on the trail. He uses dogs, a shotgun, traps and poison.

But every hunter knows that there are long odds against poisoning a jackal. You can try strychnine in balls of fat if you handle everything with forceps. Even then, something usually gives a warning. It cannot be due entirely to the human odour round the bait. Pet jackals, accustomed to being fed by human hands, will reject poison immediately, and this applies to jackal pups which have never had a chance of being taught by their parents to avoid poison.

Among the professional hunter's secrets are various methods of removing the human smell. One old hand at the game, I am told, always tries to obtain jackal's kidneys for the purpose. He makes a small kraal of thorn-branches, covers the trap near the entrance with sand, and tethers a live lamb or kid at the far end. The jackal's kidney, having been cut open, is

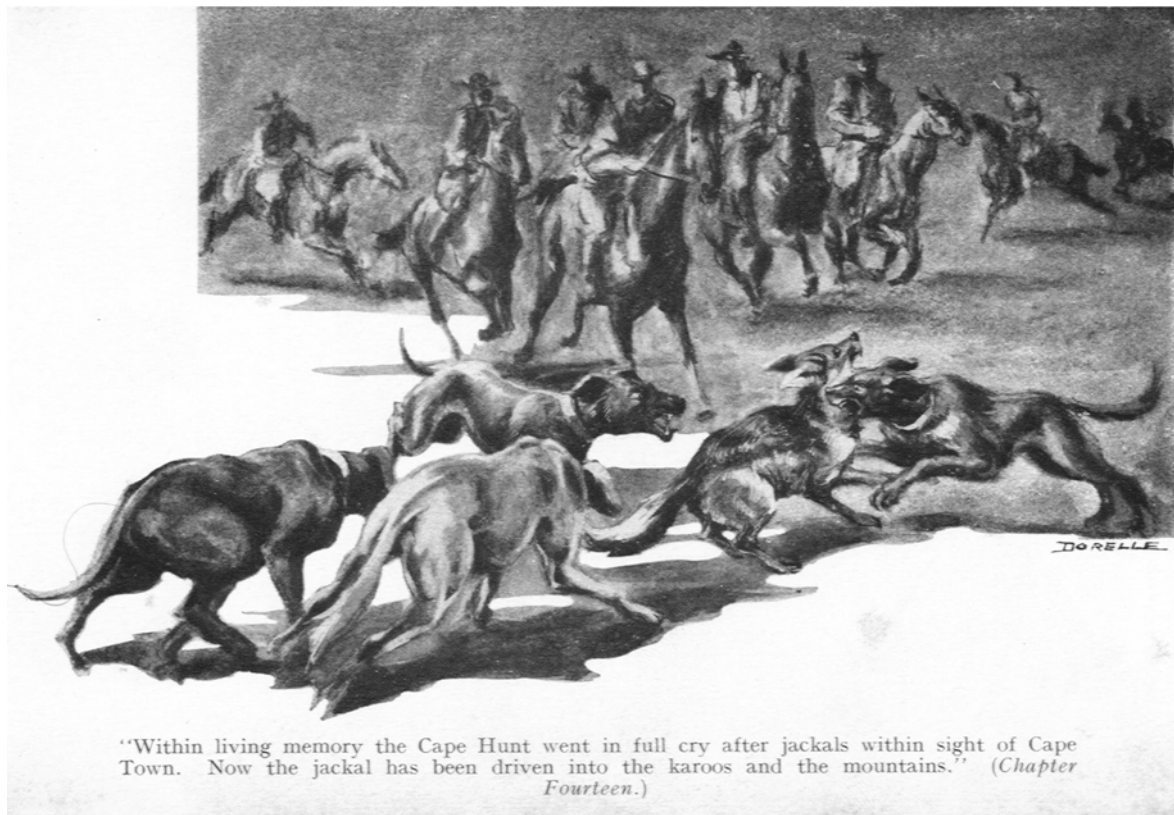
placed under the vital part of the *slagyster*. It seems that the aroma of kidney, besides deadening the human odour, makes any prowling jackal think that one of his own kind has been in the neighbourhood. As a result he feels more comfortable, goes in after the lamb, and finds himself in the steel jaws of the trap.

Experienced jackal hunters also rely largely on their skill as trackers. They watch the water-holes, and the tracks leading away into the mountains. Some of them set so many traps that it takes days to visit them all. The old coloured hunters often wore a cap of jackal's skin as the badge of their trade, and a necklace of jackal's teeth. One other part of the jackal which they never wasted was the liver, for when this had been dried and powdered it was regarded as the finest possible treatment for convulsions in children.

Broken Toe was the most famous jackal South Africa has ever known. He claimed as many headlines in his day as Huberta the Hippo, but never the same affection. Broken Toe was a

killer. Yet even the farmers who suffered so heavily during Broken Toe's eleven years of raiding must have felt a grudging admiration for this enormous and wily jackal. Broken Toe seemed to be invulnerable. It was in 1924 that the spoor of the jackal with a broken toe was first observed by Mr. S.J. Horne on his farm Kragga in the Riversdale district. In the years that followed the spoor was often seen on the coastal dunes; and not only the spoor, but Broken Toe himself, with his grey-white fur giving him protective colouring against the sand. Early in this career of crime Broken Toe started killing and maiming lambs on Mr. J.S. Human's farm Honingfontein. The jackal always attacked many more sheep than it could eat. It was a wanton killer, and as its lists of victims grew, the farmers of the district realised the danger and put up a reward of £30.

Mr. Human, smarting under heavy losses of stock, became the most determined hunter of Broken Toe. Soon he decided that ordinary



"Within living memory the Cape Hunt went in full cry after jackals within sight of Cape Town. Now the jackal has been driven into the karroos and the mountains." (*Chapter Fourteen.*)

methods were useless. Once he shot two buck, left them where they lay with poison in their carcasses, and awaited events. He had seen the tell-tale spoor, in the neighbourhood and next morning he went hopefully to the bait. Broken Toe had been there during the night, but had not touched the poison.

Traps were not worth trying, for Broken Toe had never forgotten his youthful encounter with a trap, and the broken toe it had caused. Hounds might provide the solution, and Mr. Human rode out again and again with his pack. Broken Toe outwitted them all. He covered hundreds of square miles during his sheep killing raids, and although he was sometimes sighted, more often he was far from the scene of the hunt.

Mr. Human described one of the tantalising glimpses he had of Broken Toe. Herd-boys had reported the spoor, and Mr. Hiaman had gone out at dawn with three hounds and picked up the scent. Several hours later the hounds, baffled for a moment by the tricks of the

jackal, were trying to work back on to the trail. "At that moment I saw Broken Toe standing rigid four hundred yards away from me," recalled Mr. Human. "He was watching the dogs intently, and no doubt enjoying himself hugely. He looked almost white under the sun. Then the dogs seemed to be approaching him and he was away." On another occasion Broken Toe, almost cornered, simply lay down in his tracks. The hounds passed over him, and Broken Toe then doubled back through the line of hunters and escaped.

At last the Riversdale farmers became desperate. The reward of £30 was doubled, well-trained packs of hounds were brought in from Paarl and other areas, and then began the most intensive jackal hunt ever organised. The newcomers were eager to succeed where the six Riversdale hunting clubs had failed. With marvellous stamina Broken Toe eluded them all. After a chase of twenty miles over rough country the packs always lost touch.

In July, 1935, that well-known hunter, Fick of Darling, set out on the trail of Broken Toe. He took no dogs. On the farm Swartheuvel, where some sheep had just been killed, Fick found the notorious spoor. He had not been following it for long when a huge jackal rose from cover and raced away. Fick raised his gun, as other hunters had done, but this time Broken Toe fell dead.

At first there were many who did not believe that the jackal with the charmed life had really been destroyed. The clue of the broken toe, however, marked this criminal of the veld as clearly as a fingerprint. Mr. Human, who had lost so many sheep, collected a fitting reward for the hunter who had disposed of the old enemy. The death of Broken Toe was worth much more than £60 to the Riversdale farmers. There was keen competition to secure Broken Toe's skin.

Broken Toe had killed more than four thousand sheep during eleven years of raiding. It is doubtful whether any other jackal in the

history of South Africa has claimed so many victims. Fick, the successful hunter, must have killed a thousand jackals during his career, half of them with his gun, the other half with hounds. Broken Toe died with a much higher score of sheep.

Farmers in the Beaufort West and some other karoo districts have come to look upon the little dassie as a greater enemy than jackal or baboon. Again the sensitive "balance of nature" has been upset. Where the dassie's foes have been almost exterminated, the dassie population has grown enormously.

Once the dassies were held in check mainly by the cat family, the leopard and cheetah, lynx and wild cat. Jackals enjoy a diet of dassies. The dassie colonies are often menaced from the sky when a Verreaux's eagle (known as the dassievanger) swoops down on a fat, sun-loving dassie and carries it off to its nest. Finally there is the python, which needs more

than one dassie for a proper meal. Some of these hungry dassie-eaters have diminished to a great extent after vigorous campaigns. So the dassies, finding their grazing on koppies and mountains overcrowded by their own kind, are coming down on to the karoo plains to eat the same grasses as the sheep. Many farmers believe that the dassies will one day become a national pest and menace the sheep districts to the same extent as the rabbits do (or did before they were infected with the myxomatosis disease) in Australia. The authorities agree with this view, and in 1947 dassies were added to the official list of "vermin" in the Cape. Millions have been killed since then, but still they come.

In the Old Testament the dassie appears as a "coney" or rabbit, and Leviticus included it in his list of forbidden meat "because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof, he is unclean to you." In fact, the dassie does not chew the cud, though it does sometimes give

that impression when moving its jaws reflectively.

Canon Tristram, the first naturalist to give a trustworthy account of the dassie's habits, remarked that the flesh was much prized by the Arabs. He himself found it good, but rather dry and as dark in colour as that of the hare.

Bushmen and Hottentots hunted the dassie with kerries and stones, eating the meat and using the pelts as clothing. White people seldom taste this meat, though it is wholesome and palatable. The dassie should be skinned, starting at the tip of the nose and working down under the body, using kitchen scissors or a sharp knife. After it has been disembowelled, the dassie should be cut up into suitable pieces, placed on a tray, sprinkled with pepper and salt and left for twenty-four hours. Then place the meat in a large pot with three or four cups of water and slices of onion. Boil until tender. A little water should be added from time to time. When tender the meat and onion should be allowed to brown. Then a little more water

should be added and the meat cooked for a further thirty minutes before serving. A young dassie tastes rather like chicken. Older ones should be curried.

Make no mistake about it, though - you are not eating rabbit when you tackle a plate of dassie meat. The name dassie, from the Netherlands, means badger; but it is no badger either. Dassies still baffle the naturalists. They certainly belong to the ungulates, the hoofed mammals, and they are clearly related to the elephant and the rhinoceros. The large incisor teeth, which made early investigators place this animal among the rodents, are now regarded as little elephant tusks. And the dassie's feet have certain rhino characteristics. Huxley placed the dassie in an order by itself. Cuvier declared: "Excepting the horns they are little else than rhinoceroses in miniature," The last word has not yet been said on this point.

One dassie peculiarity which no one has explained satisfactorily is the bare patch on the back, the dorsal spot which is assumed by

some naturalists to be a scent gland, active only during the breeding season. But the function of this strangely-placed spot has still to be proved. It is possible that the scented fluid enables the dassies to locate one another in thick bush or at night.

Dassies, unlike rats and rabbits, are born with their eyes open and covered with fur. They are able to fend for themselves almost at once, and here again they resemble the ungulates. They are also fond of taking dust-baths to rid themselves of fleas and parasites, just like horses and elephants.

At one time all dassies lived in the trees, and there is still a tree dassie (*Procavia arborea*) found in the eastern Cape Province and far to the north. The common dassie of the karoo regions (*Procavia capensis*) is a remarkable example of an animal which survived and left the trees and adapted itself to a new mode of life on the racks when the country dried up. Beyond the borders of South-Africa the dassie is known as the hyrax.

On the rocks, the dassie must rank among the finest climbers in the world of mammals. The thick, black, hairless soles of the feet are kept moist by sweat glands, and when the muscles form a hollow cup the dassie can cling to a precipice without fear. The suction is so powerful that a dassie, shot dead on a vertical rock face, has remained in position as though transfixed.

It seems that the dassie has nothing to fear even when it does fall from a height. The strong skeleton, loose skin and dense fur make it one of the toughest animals on earth. A dassie robbing a high fruit tree has been observed to drop with a heavy thud rather than climb down. The late Dr. Austin Roberts saw a dassie fall a hundred feet from a cliff after being shot. It fell on a rocky surface, but in spite of the bullet wound and the impact it raced away to shelter.

So the dassie can take risks that no human climber would consider for a moment. Roberts watched a dassie family, with a long drop below them, flinging themselves at a rock face and

bouncing off to alight on a ledge that could be reached in no other way.

Dassies are great sun-lovers, dreaming away the days on the warm rocks. But like the baboons, they have their sentinels. Some squeak, others emit a loud warning scream. Hottentots will tell you that although dassies and pythons are old foes, the dassies are friendly with poisonous snakes. They say that a dassie will always warn a cobra of the approach of its deadly enemy, the secretary bird.

The eyesight of the dassie is excellent, and hunters are sometimes observed a mile away. They can stare into the sun for long periods without blinking; possibly the only mammals that can do so. Only recently did a zoologist dissect the eye of a dassie and observe the unusual structure. Dassies hear well in spite of their short ears, and their sense of smell is keen.

Dassies have their own shrill language and some people know how to call the wild dassies out of their crevices in the rocks. "*Wit-she, wit-*

she," is the call, delivered with a hiss and mingled with barks and gutturals.

You have to put your bullet through the dassie's heart or brain if you wish to recover the body. They are notoriously hard to kill. Even when grievously wounded they will make for their rocks with the last of their strength, and drag themselves into a deep crevice to recover or die.

When a dassie hunt is organized the farmers usually employ packs of dogs. On the ground, away from the rocks, the dassie is at a disadvantage and is easily run down by dogs or men. In a crevice, however, a cornered dassie will inflate its body and use its feet to resist anyone trying to haul it out. It will also bite furiously. Professional hunters have adopted a cruel method of finishing off the elusive dassie. They use a long corkscrew device which finds the dassie in its inaccessible refuge and pierces the body. Dassies will not take poison, and it is hard to devise a trap that will capture many of them.

It is often said on the karoo that ten dassies eat as much as one sheep. Nevertheless, the dassie is not without friends among the scientists. Defenders of the dassie point out that dassies (unlike rabbits) breed only once a year, with two or three in the litter. Dassies only become mature at the age of two years. And they thrive on many harmful weeds which sheep do not touch. These scientists also point out that if you exterminate the dassie, many carnivorous animals will prey on the sheep instead.

The defenders have made another good point worth investigating. They say that the dassies never move far from their rocky strongholds. How then can these slow-moving creatures destroy the grazing on plains where they dare not venture far?

However, it is most unlikely that the dassie will be exterminated, for its powers of recovery are astounding. Dr. Austin Roberts pointed out that in recent years nearly all the dassies in the karoo contracted bubonic plague through their

fleas and died off; yet today there is no visible sign of a decrease in the dassie population.

If the killing of dassies could be made to show a profit, the dassie might be in some danger. Dassie skins make excellent kurosses, but they were in much greater demand in the days of ox-wagons and Cape carts. The closed motor-car has affected the whole kaross trade. So you can buy a dassie kaross for about seven pounds. About forty skins go to a double-bed kaross; but if you are thinking of hunting dassies for this purpose, remember to secure double the required number so that the skins may be graded and shaded properly. Winter skins are essential, and they must not be pelts from dassies that have been poisoned.

Many attempts have been made to market the dassie skin overseas, but never with success. One dealer who sent samples to Germany was informed that the Continental river rats yielded better and larger skins. So the farmers claim their rewards for destroying "vermin", and millions of dassie skins are piled on the official bonfires.

Early travellers in the Cape, men with scientific training, were puzzled by a peculiar substance they found in some caves, black masses like pitch. Thunberg thought it was bitumen. But the Bushmen and Hottentots knew better, and so did many farmers. They call the substance *klipsweet* or *dassipis*. In the Cape Pharmacopoeia it is listed more delicately as *hyracium*. Hyracium has been used as a medicine for centuries. It is one of those traditional remedies which are endowed with almost magical powers by credulous people.

Dr. L. Pappe, author of the pioneer work on Cape medical remedies, devoted an appendix in his 1857 pamphlet to this substance. He explained that the dassie seldom drank, so that the urine was not thin and limpid but thick and glutinous. "From a peculiar instinct these animals are in the habit of secreting the urine always at one spot, where its watery parts evaporate in the sun, while its more tenacious portions stick to the rock and harden in the air," Pappe wrote. "Among the farmers a solution of this substance is highly spoken of as an antispasmodic in hysterics, epilepsy,

convulsions of children, St. Vitus' dance, in short in spasmodic affections of every kind."

The Rev. H. Kling, the Rhenish missionary who studied herbal and other remedies and wrote "*Die Sieketrooster*", also thought highly of hyracium. In his pamphlet he quoted a Dr. A. Brown, who declared that he prescribed it daily. By this means he had cured a long-standing case of hypochondria and hysterical nervousness which had baffled many practitioners. Another patient had been in bed for eighteen months with a hectic fever, regarded as a hopeless case by several doctors. After taking hyracium, she became fat and plump, and was cured in a month.

The origin of this deep belief lies in the herbal diet of the dassie. It is argued that hyracium contains the herbs, including buchu, in a highly-concentrated form. Hottentot medicine men boiled and strained the gluey substance and administered it by mouth for many sorts of poisoning and for pains in the back and stomach. In dried, powdered form, it was rubbed into the scarified flesh after snake bite or scorpion sting.

I believe hyracium is still bought by manufacturing chemists. It is then refined and embodied in medicines for the treatment of disordered kidneys. A fragment the size of a pea, dissolved in boiling water, is still the great karoo remedy for colds and influenza. When brandy is added, the patient is even more eager to swallow this strange old nostrum.

Two friends of mine once discovered a cave containing huge masses of hyracium, and they were kind enough to present the South African Museum with a sixty-pound lump. This gift led to some newspaper publicity, but they outwitted rival treasure hunters by giving out that the cave was in the Cold Bokkeveld Mountains near Ceres. Then they brought load after load of the precious hyracium to Cape Town and sold it to the chemical firms at several shillings a pound. Recently I learnt the true position of the cave, near the summit of the Pakhuis Pass outside Clanwilliam. Hyracium is formed only in a dry climate, and there are many such caves in the

karoo districts, where the atmosphere allows the substance to coagulate.

I wish that I could tell you that the dassie is really a benefactor of mankind, but unfortunately the modern scientist makes short work of hyracium. Professor J.M. Watt, the pharmacologist who has investigated so many South African medicines, found it in use in some places to cure sharp pains in the ear; others pulverised and mixed it with goats' fat and applied it as plaster to ulcers. "Alas for men's faith in such remedies," Watt summed up. "The effect is only psychological."

CHAPTER 15

SCIENCE OR SORCERY?

WATER in the karoo is often worth more than a reef of gold. I once heard of a farmer who became so desperate that he gave his pet baboons salty food and then released them to see where they would dig for water.

Every district in the karoo has its *waterwyser*, the diviner or dowser whose willow twig will twitch and point to running streams beneath

the sun-baked sand. Or so the anxious farmer hopes. Is it science or sorcery? No one can tell you why the divining rod dips and twists. It is as simple as the homing instinct of the pigeon, and just as hard to explain.

There was a time when dowsing was regarded as an unlawful act made possible only by a contract with Satan. The job has now become somewhat more respectable. When the borehole yields water as promised, the diviner is a public benefactor who has earned every penny of his fee. And if there is no water - well, the drilling may have been done badly, or the borehole was not deep enough. Sometimes the farmer does not have the satisfaction of calling the unsuccessful dowser an imposter. Long before the borehole has been sunk, the diviner has passed on over the horizon. Water diviners vary greatly both in character and skill. Most of them are honest people who are convinced that they have the power to find water and sometimes other hidden objects as well. In fact, it is now generally admitted that

the divining rod does respond to subterranean water. Only when you seek the explanation do you come up against the old mystery. There are theories, but nothing has been proved.

Possibly one person in three would make a dowser, given the right training. I once employed a dowser who operated his own drilling machine. He struck water on my property, but at greater depth than his estimate; so he reduced his bill to soften the blow. Such men, who see the results of their dowsing, amass great experience of the "lie of the land", all the surface details, the known springs, trees and vegetation -- the clues, in fact, to underground water. They go on using their twigs, but some say that they are guided more by practical experience than by any mysterious twitching. At all events they follow the venture through from start to finish, and they are on the spot to answer for their failures.

No doubt there was a dowser among those who stepped on shore with Van Riebeeck from the *Drommedaris*. Barrow, more than a century

and a half ago, wrote of his meeting with an Irish water diviner in the Cape *platteland*. This man had been "impressing the Dutch with his powers", using a lens with an air bubble. He told the farmers that the bubble was a drop of water possessing the sympathetic quality of always turning towards its kindred element. He begged Barrow not to expose him.

Yet there are dowsers who have scored one "hit" after another where qualified geologists with instruments have failed. (And vice versa, it is only fair to add). Let us watch them in action and see whether it is possible to form an opinion about this controversial art.

South African dowsers seem to prefer a forked twig from a weeping willow, though mimosa, quince or the sinews of a young cockerel will all serve the purpose. I have heard of a German dowser who used a sausage. Some dowsers walk barefooted to allow the mysterious forces direct contact; others wear hobnailed boots. Rubber soles appear to insulate the dowser from the electromagnetic field - if indeed there

is such a thing - which is supposed to bring the twig to life.

As a rule the dowser holds his arms in front of his chest, hands turned inwards, grasping the stick firmly and with the fork pointing into the air. He marches to and fro across the veld, seeking the hidden vein of water; and when he reaches the spot the twig jerks downwards against the normal action of the wrist muscles. Sometimes the rod snaps. Some dowsers swear that the divining rod moves with such force on occasions that it takes the skin off the palms of their hands.

Sir Ray Lankester, F.R.S., declared that the antics of the divining rod were caused by fatigue of the muscles and their sudden and unconscious relaxation. The relaxing movement occurred more readily in certain conditions of the nervous system, when the attention was concentrated on the search and the unconscious control of the muscles was in abeyance. Thus the simple-minded operator (as

Lankester regarded him) believed that a spontaneous movement of the twig occurred.

Lankester's theory, however, breaks down when the dowser produces the same queer "dowsing reflex" without the aid of the twig. A metal ball suspended by a thread indicates the underground water long before muscular fatigue sets in. So the modern scientific opinion admits the possibility of some form of "radiation" from the hidden stream. The dowser experiences a slight change of tone in the arm muscles, and the rod amplifies this reaction.

Some dowsers claim that their arms tremble violently and their facial muscles contract when they pass over water. Tickling in the feet is another symptom, while a feeling of suffocation has been reported. But research into dowsing has not been carried very far. The nature or the "radiation" which affects the dowser with more or less dramatic intensity is still obscure. You can call it electricity if you like, or cosmic rays. Science does not know.

One seldom hears of women as dowzers. Ministers of religion and mere boys appear prominently in the annals of this strange art. Only a few years ago the Rev. J.J. Engelbrecht found water for the town of Willowmore. He predicted five thousand gallons an hour at five hundred feet and undertook to pay for the borehole if he was wrong. He turned out to be almost exactly right. This minister of the Dutch Reformed Church declares that practically every farm has a stream giving at least five thousand gallons an hour; and he believes that South Africa could be transformed into a farmer's paradise.

Namaqualand farmers were placing great faith in a twelve-year old coloured boy, Dawid Brand, in 1949. He gained his reputation as a result of successful water-divining not only in Namaqualand, but also in the arid wastes of Bushmanland, Gordonia and South West Africa. Dawid was a shepherd on Mr. Jan Tillie van Niekerk's farm near Gamoep; and he was out with his employer's son Cornelis one

day when he demonstrated his skill by accident. Cornelis lost some money and bullets in the sand. As soon as Dawid heard of this he went straight to the spot and recovered everything.

Dawid's unusual, reddish-brown eyes saw water at a certain depth after one of the farm's boreholes had dried up. The farmer drilled a few feet deeper, and up came the water. Dawid also claimed to be able to see the contents of a sick calf's stomach. Later he told Cornelis that he could see inside human beings, and that his powers frightened him. For this reason he held aloof from people, confiding only in Cornelis.

It all sounds fantastic, but Dawid Brand has provided many surprises for doubters. He found water on a Bushmanland farm where every previous borehole had been unsuccessful. On another farm he could see no trace of water. Government drillers sank boreholes to four hundred feet after Dawid's effort, and they failed completely.

I find it extremely interesting to compare Dawid Brand's recent activities in Namaqualand with reports of the achievements of youthful dowzers in Europe centuries ago. You find precisely the same details. "This child can see through the ground springs and water pipes however deep they may be", runs the record of Jean Tarangue, aged fourteen, of Marseilles (1772). "He sees water as we see wine in a glass." You will also discover stories of dowzers who could diagnose gout, rheumatism, neuralgia and heart symptoms as easily as they located underground streams. And many of the famous dowzers of the past were credited with finding lost and hidden objects - just like little Dawid Brand of Namaqualand, who could not possibly, have heard of these remarkable happenings in distant lands.

South Africa's most celebrated young diviner in recent years has been Pieter van Jaarsveld, the red-headed "boy with the X-ray eyes". There is really nothing new in his way of

finding water or minerals; but diviners like Dawid Brand and Pieter van Jaarsveld, who "see" beneath the earth's surface, are not encountered nearly as often as those who use the twig.

Van Jaarsveld declares that he sees a beam of light on the ground, like moonlight striking through a window-pane. The light vibrates in such a way that he can follow an underground stream. He traces one artery until it crosses another, then plants a stick where the greatest supply of water can be expected. He feels the arteries so keenly that he can follow a hidden vein of water in the dark. At work, Pieter van Jaarsveld walks as though he is drowsy, both feet dragging, eyes fixed on the ground. He becomes vigorous only when he "sees" water. Pieter charges £25 for each site he discovers, and he has earned £300 within two days. But even an ordinary day's work often leaves him with a head-ache. That is the penalty for possessing "X-ray eyes".

Metal dowsers usually hold in their hands or tip the divining rod with a sample of the metal which it is desired to find. They admit that gold is difficult, unless it happens to be in the form of sovereigns buried near the surface. They say that it is essential to concentrate on the metal, note their responses, and "tune in" to the sample before setting out in search of the metal. Silver, if it is present in large quantities, causes a stabbing pain in the dowser's feet. Petroleum affects the elbow. Some dowsers claim that "waves" enter the body through the feet when they pass over water.

Many people are sensitive to water, but the ability to indicate hidden metals is comparatively rare. One faint clue to the vast mystery may be found in an experience shared by dowsers who are able to trace both metals and water. They all declare that they must have the object of the search in mind before the start. A dowser seeking water will not respond to the richest ore just beneath his feet. He must go through the whole process again,

concentrating on a particular metal, if he is to find that metal.

How does the dowser realize that he has the gift? Probably many people go through life without discovering their power in this respect. Oom Piet Myburgh, the old "water wizard" of the North West Cape, was out on the veld near Prieska as a boy of fourteen when the stick he was carrying bent downwards sharply. It gave him a shock, and he rushed home to tell his father about it. His father guessed that the boy was a diviner, and tests proved that he was right. In this case it is interesting to note that Piet Myburgh was not concentrating on anything in particular when his stick indicated the forces at work in his body.

Pieter van Jaarsveld was six years old, on the farm at Burghersdorp, Cape, when he found his father sinking a borehole at a spot where no water was to be "seen". Now little Pieter had assumed, up till then, that everyone could "see" underground water. He, too, suffered from shock when it came home to him that he was different from other people. His father did not believe him

at first, but when he drilled in vain he decided to consult his little boy. Pieter showed him the right spot. Later he added to his reputation by finding a gold ring which his schoolmistress had hidden in a heap of sand.

Water diviners complain that they have no rest when their beds happen to be placed over a strong vein of water. Many mysterious human aches and pains, according to the diviners, are caused by streams beneath the room in which the sensitive person sits or sleeps. The remedy is to pad the floor thickly with newspaper or pulp building board.

Some dowzers are soon exhausted. If they use the twig more than three times a day they find the effort unbearable. Others say that the power of divining leaves them from time to time, but that it always returns. The really sensitive dowser not only finds water, but tells you the depth, the number of gallons an hour a borehole will yield, whether fresh or brackish, and the type of rock through which the drill will pass.

Scientists have done their best to trap the dowzers, and they have trapped a good many imposters. But the honest dowser, the tool of his divining rod, has provided the scientists with riddles they cannot solve. And the man who ought to know all about it, the dowser himself, is as much in the dark as the world's finest scientists.

CHAPTER 16

KAROO SNAKES

IF you meet a poisonous snake anywhere in the dry karoo regions it will probably be a puff adder, cobra or boom slang. It may be a spotted skaapsteker, of course, or a karoo whip snake; but these are not so common. Other snakes which favour the dry areas, though they are rarely seen, are the coral snake and the horned adder.

It would be more difficult to find a genuine *slangmeester* nowadays than any of the snakes I have mentioned. Some of the old karoo Hottentots undoubtedly possessed the art of

proofing themselves against all sorts of poisons, especially snake venom. I would not say that the last *slangmeester* or *gifdokter* has passed on, for as recently as 1928, the late Dr. P.W. Laidler found an extremely clever one practising in Namaqualand. This was Jacob Klaas, who had learnt his queer profession from his father, a full-blooded Hottentot. But this knowledge seems always to have been rare, and now the narrow circle of wise men must be almost extinct.

That the *slangmeester* himself was immune to the fatal effect of snake poison there is no doubt. He cut his arms and rubbed in graduated doses of the two great venoms, puff adder and cobra, at the right intervals. In the end, no snake could kill him. As for scorpions, he treated them with contempt and they were allowed to sting him simply to impress his audience.

Those who have observed the *slangmeester* closely say that he was always, to some extent, under the influence of the various poisons in

his body. He was never entirely free from a queer sort of lethargy. He was nearly always cold and sleepy, and only felt comfortable on the burning summer days.

Probably the *slangmeesters* of centuries ago discovered the seasons when snake venoms are most virulent. (Midsummer is the most dangerous period). They identified the species which seldom caused death, even with a full bite. They realized that a deadly snake often fails to deliver enough venom to cause serious symptoms, apart from those induced by the victim's own fears. They must have known, too, that six human victims out of ten recover without any form of treatment. So they passed on to their pupils various items of knowledge which our own scientists have confirmed in recent years. Once these facts are understood, the performance loses its magic. But nothing can rob primitive man of the credit of unravelling complicated processes at periods when civilized man was ruled by superstition and ignorance when he encountered snakes. It

is a fact that many white people in South Africa still accept the medieval folklore of the snake world as fact.

No doubt the *slangmeester* sucked out some of the venom if he happened to be on the spot when the bite was inflicted. I found a description of the methods of one of these old Hottentots, named Jantjie, when a two-year-old child was brought to him with a leg swollen to twice the normal size. Jantjie examined the two punctures made by a puff adder's fangs, then tied the leg below the knee with a strong riem and allowed it to hang over the edge of the bed. The child was in great pain, but Jantjie made a deep incision over the fang marks with a pocket-knife and opened up the punctures. When the blood was flowing freely he untied the thong and manipulated the veins so that more blood exuded from the open wound. Finally he rubbed a brownish powder into the wound and the bleeding stopped. Jantjie then gave medicine to cause vomiting. Soon the

swelling went down, and the child slept and recovered.

Many natives believe that if you swallow the poison bag of a snake which has bitten you, the bag will act as an antidote to the poison. Fitzsimons carried out experiments on many animals to test this theory; for example, he fed a jackal on puff adder venom for six weeks and then allowed a puff adder to bite it. One hour later the jackal was dead.

Some farmers still have great faith in the so-called "snake stones" - the *slangsteentjies* hundreds of years old which came originally from the Dutch East Indies and have been preserved as heirlooms. Seldom can the owner of a snake stone be persuaded to sell it. After all, it may save his life one day!

These porous stones are usually flat and about the size of small coins. Thunberg, nearly two hundred years ago, remarked that farmers would pay the equivalent of £50 for these stones. "The genuineness of a snake stone is

tested by its adhering to the palate when placed in the mouth," Thunberg wrote. "When it is applied to any part which has been bitten by a serpent it sticks fast to the wound and extracts the poison. As soon as it is saturated it falls off by itself. If it is then put into milk it is supposed to be purified and the milk is said to turn blue." Thunberg believed in the power of the snake stone and quoted examples of its successful use in rinkals poisoning.

Selous the hunter was another believer. He recorded that an old Boer friend, Frikkie de Lange, had a snake stone "that had saved the lives of many people and horses," and for which he had refused an offer of £50. Selous met a Miss Fortman who stated that as a child she had been bitten by a cobra and saved by means of a snake stone.

Dr. William Simpson, district surgeon of Tulbagh in the fifties of last century, used a snake stone in his medical practice. Dozens of farmers attended the sale of his equipment after his death in the hope of securing the

doctor's famous Bengal snake stone; but I believe that a bid of £100 was refused and the heir to the estate retained the stone.

Hottentot *slangmeesters* sometimes used a type of snake stone which was believed to be part of a snake. "I saw a snake's light last night," people in Namaqualand still declare. According to folklore, if a snake's hole is closed with earth the snake will bite itself to death. Next morning the snake stone is found in front of the hole. Sometimes a twinkle is seen against the rocks in the darkness, and the Hottentots will go in search of the priceless snake stone. "It is the snake's strength and must be stolen," they say. Probably the glimmer was one of the many quartz crystals, loose or embedded in the rocks, which occur all over Narnadualand and reflect light at night.

There is a tale of a Hottentot *slangmeester* who placed such faith in a snake stone that he allowed his own son to be bitten by a cobra. The stone was applied immediately and the

boy suffered no ill-effects. If this story has any foundation, it is probable that the *slangmeester* tricked his audience, either with a snake which had just been "milked" or with a harmless snake.

Yes, it is sad to relate after such marvellous testimony that the snake stone is a complete fraud. Many scientists have tested the stones and found them to be mere fragments of charred bone, or chalk, of a composition of vegetable matter. They are all absorbent, but in such low degree that the small quantity of poisoned blood which may be drawn out of the wound is of little or no importance. Nevertheless, the owner of a snake stone is often a fanatic whose faith remains unshaken.

Another great South African snake-bite remedy of last century was "Croft's Tincture". You would not find many karoo homesteads without a bottle of this magic mixture. "Honniball's Patent Wonderful Extract" was another; while many believed in "Fisher's Balsam of Life," eau-de-luce, ipecacuanha,

quinine, arsenical "Tanjore pills" from India, and various roots, barks and herbs. Analysts have discovered that most of the proprietary snake-bite "cures" consisted of strychnine and ammonia. Strychnine may act as a nerve stimulant, but it is no more use than ammonia in neutralizing snake venom.

Nothing can compare with the modern, concentrated, ant venomous serum, which deals effectively with both nerve and blood poisons. When this is not available, a tourniquet must be applied without delay, tight enough to stop the circulation of the blood. Then incise the fang wounds and rub a paste of permanganate of Potash (a few crystals mixed with a few drops of water) into the wound. The crystals alone burn too much. This is probably the best of all the old treatments, as it destroys all the venom with which it comes into contact. Unfortunately it cannot follow the venom into the body.

Alcohol has killed a number of snake-bite victims who might have recovered if they had

been left alone. Many country people have an inflexible belief in the power of brandy to counteract the venom, provided the patient empties the bottle. People who are unaccustomed to such heroic doses suffer from alcoholic poisoning at the very time when they need all their strength to combat the venom. A tot or two may be beneficial, however, in preventing the sufferer from becoming terror-stricken.

It should be remembered that when a snake injects a full dose of poison, a child is more seriously affected than an adult because of the smaller blood capacity. Thus a child requires a larger dose of anti-venene than an adult.

Carbolic soap is a useful first-aid remedy for certain snake-bites. The discovery was made in India and investigated by the South African Institute for Medical Research. It was found that a five per cent solution of the soap gave some protection against Cape cobra and rinkals venom, but did more harm than good when the bite had been inflicted by a puff adder.

Every year about forty thousand people in the world (but mainly in India) are killed by snakes. South African fatalities would only account for a small fraction of the world total, the reason being that people of all races in the Union walk delicately. The snake inspires terror. Even the proud Zulu will run from a snake. India's fatalistic millions are careless.

The late Mr. W.E. Fairbridge, a tireless historian, went through all the South African records he could find, including newspapers, from 1772 to 1918, and noted every case of snake-bite reported. He found recorded only 130 fatalities during that long period. The puff-adder came first on Fairbridge's list, with the cobra second. In Natal, however, the mamba headed the list.

Fairbridge never published his findings, but I have studied his notes on this subject. I found that he had come across a painful episode on the Cold Bokkeveld early last century. A

farmer, J.H. Steenkamp, sent out a young female Hottentot with her infant at breast to herd cattle. When she did not return that evening, Steenkamp thought she had deserted. On the third day, however, she was found dead on the veld, an obvious snake-bite victim. The child was still alive, and was saved.

Fairbridge's notes proved that all through the years, children were the most frequent victims. Again and again the old newspaper reports used the phrase: "Croft's tincture was applied, but without effect." It is clear that some young children do not display the instinctive horror of snakes which comes in due course to most people. A true story from Grootdrink on the Orange River near Upington illustrates this fact. Mrs. Vollgraaff noticed that her five-year-old son Henry always took a small parcel of food with him when he went out to play. He said it was for his "friend", and his mother thought he was feeding a stray dog. One day she followed him and found him sitting beside a rock with a large Cape cobra eating porridge

out of his hand. Mr. Vollgraaff killed the snake, to Henry's great distress.

"I used to stroke him and he likes it," Henry sobbed. "He lay quite still and never did anything to me."

Snakes are credited with the power to fascinate, or hypnotise their prey. Men have remained within striking distance when common-sense should have aided them to escape. Small animals have been observed in deadly peril of an approaching snake, yet making no effort to escape. But there is nothing to show that men, monkeys or mice are influenced in such situations by anything outside their own bodies. A man, terror-stricken, may become "rooted to the spot", and monkeys and apes are believed to acquire the same foolish behaviour as a result of watching older members of the tribe. Imagination makes cowards, and the repulsive appearance of the creeping snake creates a form of fear that may even paralyse the muscles. The small animals, such as rats, that await death unmoved, are

probably so interested in the arrival of the snake that they do not consider retreat until it is too late.

One hears many sensational snake legends. The puff-adder is said to strike backwards and leap eight feet into the air. The Pack mamba puts its tail into its mouth and rolls after a victim like a hoop. Adders defend their young by swallowing them. Young puff-adders kill their parents at birth. All these tales I have heard related in lonely farm-houses with such solemnity that I dared not express my doubts: Useless to point out that the anatomy of the snake is not adapted for any of the marvels described.

The rinkals and black-necked cobras, however, undoubtedly possess a mechanism for spitting their venom up to a distance of about ten feet. They aim for the eyes, whether they are attacking man or beast, and the pain is distressing. Fortunately the venom is easily removed by swilling it out with plain water. Strange to say, the victim may find his

eyesight wonderfully improved after the pain has left him.

Do snakes procure milk from cows and even women? This belief is deeply-rooted among a great many farming people, white and coloured, all over South Africa. It is one of the oldest fallacies in the country - if indeed it is entirely without truth. Such an authority as Fitzsimons confessed that it puzzled him. The belief was so general. "I do not say that it is untrue, but I cannot bring myself to believe it," he wrote.

Mr. Edgar Layard, curator of the South African Museum a century ago, investigated the story and invited anyone with experience in the matter to produce evidence. He had heard, he said, of snakes twining their bodies round a cow's hind legs and "drawing at the teats with great composure". Layard also mentioned the belief that a snake had the power of charming a cow, once sucked, back to the same spot. Such a cow would call to the snake as if it were her calf.

"Some ladies are said to have been personal sufferers from the reptile's depredations," added Layard with nice Victorian delicacy. "If any kind friend will prove the fact of cow-sucking, I hereby engage to have the snake stuffed and placed in the museum with a cow."

This offer brought to light a farmer's wife with a remarkable story. She described an incident on a wine farm when the grapes were ripe. Some of the labourers were scaring the birds away from the vineyard with whips; but at midday it was too hot for both the labourers and the birds. The coloured men went to rest under the trees; and nearby was the wife of one of them. She was a Hottentot woman with a good deal of white blood, and she had an infant on her arm. The woman dozed. Then she felt uneasy, and awoke to find a large venomous snake fastened to one of her breasts. The baby was sleeping with its mouth to the other, and the snake lay across the child.

Keeping herself under control, the woman quietly called to her husband. "Leave the snake

alone," she told him. "It will roll off when it is gorged." As she spoke it moved off the baby, and the father put his child gently out of harm's way. Meanwhile the other labourers had called the farmer.

The farmer wept when he saw the woman in such a painful quandary and asked her what she wished done. She urged everyone to keep perfectly still. "I feel as if the Almighty is directing her, and she must be obeyed," declared the farmer.

Very soon the snake fell off, replete and helpless: In a moment the husband made good use of his hatchet. "The glutton was hewed in pieces and the poor woman sprang to her feet, truly thankful for her escape," reported the farmer's wife. "The ground where the remains of the snake lay appeared as if a basin of milk had been poured over it."

The farmer's wife added that the woman had been aroused by a painful sensation. "As the fangs are in the sides of the jaws," she pointed out, "there would be room enough for even a middle-sized

snake, especially the broad, flat-headed kind, to lay hold of what would procure it the milk. The woman felt a good deal of pain all the time the reptile was sucking, but the skin was not broken."

Layard remarked that the same tale was told in India, where snakes suckled cows, goats and native women asleep on the ground. He might also have included the variant told for centuries in England; the hedgehog that drains the udders of cows during the night to the surprise of the milkmaid and the indignation of the farmer. Other creatures of English folklore possessing the same mischievous habit are the slow-worm and the fern-owl. However, Layard remained unconvinced. "The idea is slyly encouraged by the farm labourers, who accuse the snakes of having sucked what they themselves have stolen," commented Layard.

Well, that was a hundred years ago, and still the story goes on with the farmers themselves giving evidence in favour of it. Mr. P. J. J. Pienaar of Franschhoek declared in 1952 that he had a black cow which was in milk, though every evening he

found the udder empty. Then someone suggested that a snake was taking the milk, so Mr. Pienaar kept the cow at home and milked it. Next day he sent the cow back to the veld and watched it closely. The cow stood mooing in a part of the veld where there were a number of holes. Mr. Pienaar crept up close to the cow and saw a snake emerge, rear up and drink. No sooner had the snake left the cow than Mr. Pienaar struck it dead.

Mr. Hendrik Human of the farm Biesiedam in the Vosburg district, in February 1954, was sceptical when his cowherd reported that a puff-adder was drawing milk from one of his cows. Nevertheless, he hurried to the spot and shot a fat, fully-grown puff-adder. The snake was full of milk, confirming the boy's story. No wonder Fitzsimons was puzzled.

Motorists, I think, often see more snakes in a day than others encounter in a year. I soon learnt to resist the temptation of racing forward to run over snakes. It appears to be an easy way of dealing

with a pest; actually, it is a perilous amusement. The first snake I drove over, a cobra, was thrown up by the wheel against the windscreen. Other motorists have carried snakes with them for miles, finding them under the bonnet or on the floor in the back, and still vigorous enough to bite. One driver discovered a large cobra hissing beside his leg in a limousine at night. He was afraid to use his brakes for fear of nipping the snake underfoot. A moment's thought, and he switched off the ignition, opened the door, and flung himself from the moving car. The right choice, I think, for if he had been bitten, he might have died before help reached him. As it was, only the car was damaged.

Some people claim to be able to detect the presence of snakes by peculiar odours, varying from the fragrance of flowers to a sharp smell like that of burnt potatoes. Outside the reptile house in a zoo, however, it is extremely doubtful whether snakes betray themselves in this way. It is also asserted that snakes dislike certain odours, particularly crushed garlic. This belief is so preva-

lent that I have known campers to hang up ropes smeared with garlic outside their tents at night. Fitzsimons carried out a series of experiments to test the theory. He found that many species of snakes crawled without hesitation over the rope. It seems that the usual snake-bite outfit with antivenomous serum is still the best form of insurance.

There is great conflict of opinion on the noises made by snakes. Among the strange sounds of the African night, many have heard mysterious "crowing" sounds which have been attributed to cobras; while the "humming" note of the puff-adder has been widely reported. Sir Hector Duff once heard "a singular, long-drawn metallic sound or cry, like the high note of a wire in the wind", which puzzled him. His servants declared it was the voice of the crowing snake, a tree cobra more deadly than others of the species. Father Guilleme of Nyassaland noted similar sounds on many occasions, sounds like a gentle snore or the purring of a cat. He declared that there were

snakes capable of producing sounds like a cock preparing its vocal chords to greet the dawn.

There is no doubt that one snake can store sufficient venom to kill a number of animals. Oxen have been accidentally driven over a snake, and several of the team have died. A hunting party once lost several valuable dogs as a result of a chance meeting with one cornered snake. Fortunately the escapes from snakes outnumber the fatalities. The luckiest escape on record, perhaps, was that of a man who went out shooting with an orange in his pocket. A snake killed the dogs and then struck out at the man. The venom was found in the orange.

Finally there was the government official, far from medical help, who was bitten by a snake. He drew his revolver, shot the snake, then shot off the injured finger. For some time he preserved both the snake and the finger in bottles as proof of his truly remarkable tale. Anti-climax was brought about one day by a naturalist who pointed out that the snake was not of a poisonous species.

There was a time when a tame secretary bird might have been seen on duty in the poultry yard of many karoo farms, killing snakes and keeping an eye open for raiders from the sky. The poultry-keeper knew very well that such a guardian might occasionally take an egg or chick as a fee for services rendered. Looking at it broadly, however, the secretary bird earned his keep by seeing that no other creature robbed the poultry yard.

It is as a snake-killer, the traditional *slang-vreter*, that this stately bird is famous in South Africa. Though it can soar like an eagle, it prefers to spend most of its life searching the ground for snakes and other items of food.

When Sagittarius the secretary bird discovers a snake you see a sinister ballet dance indeed. Hardly once in a hundred such duels does the snake stand a chance. With outspread wings the bird leaps in, striking again and again with its

powerful feet. It kicks like an ostrich, then rips the dead snake to pieces with its beak.

The bird's technique varies when dealing with poisonous and non-poisonous snakes. There can be no doubt that it knows the difference. Face to face with a rinkals, for example, the bird dances warily and uses its wings as shields. But it will hold a harmless snake down with its feet and use its beak as a weapon.

The kick of this bird is something to remember, and it can stamp a rat flat with a few well-timed blows. Yet the slender legs are brittle and easily broken.

Sagittarius serpentarius deserves his scientific name. His gait is that of an archer rather than a secretary, though the black and grey crest feathers do resemble quill pens. Although he is a bird of prey, he has been placed in a genus of his own. It was difficult too classify a bird with the hooked bill of an eagle and the body and legs of a stork. The caracara of South America may be a relative, but in Africa the

secretary bird stands alone. Dr. Leonard Gill regards the secretary bird and the ostrich as the most typical African birds; true denizens of this continent.

Secretary birds are not mute, as some writers have stated. They have a rattling cry not unlike that of the Stanley crane. Pet secretary birds often become a nuisance with their alarming hiccups and harsh croaking for food.

Most authorities on wild life are agreed that the secretary bird does more good than harm. H.A. Bryden summed up in this way: "If they do occasionally take toll of the young of game birds, hares and other creatures, their achievements among locusts, snakes, lizards, rats, mice, frogs, insects, the young muishonds and other weasel-like and destructive creatures far outbalance any injury that their omnivorous appetites may inflict on South African sportsmen."

Le Vaillant, the French traveller, claimed to have seen a secretary bird's stomach containing

eleven large lizards, eleven small tortoises and five snakes "as thick as a man's arm". That was going a bit too far, as Le Vaillant often did. Nevertheless, this writer gave one of the most vivid early descriptions of the fearless bird that knows how to deal with snakes.

CHAPTER 17

CRIME IN THE KAROO

MURDER is a crime of the cities, but murderers also appear in the lonely places, where their crimes go unpunished for years. It was in the Little Karoo that Gerrit Johannes Swanepoel killed his victims. This human monster must have butchered a dozen men before he went to the gallows.

Swanepoel was a stock farmer at Rietfontein in Attaquaskloof, a valley in the Oudtshoorn district. It was a remote farm, though in 1839 Swanepoel's father lived in the same kloof. Some called the place Swanepoel's Poort. You can judge Swanepoel's reputation, even in those days, by the story that he once lost his

temper with his own mother and fired a shot at her. The mark where the bullet struck a door was shown to an official long afterwards.

It was said that Swanepoel put his brand on any unbranded cattle found in his neighbourhood. In that way he had built up a large herd. His house was large and well built, surrounded by a thorn-bush fence. A pack of fierce boer dogs roamed with Swanepoel, ready to do his bidding.

Swanepoel was first arrested in 1840 for flogging a Hottentot woman so severely that she nearly died. Judge Menzies and a jury tried him when the Circuit Court came to George, and he was sentenced to two years' hard labour. He served his time on Robben Island. There he became friendly with a half-caste, Stoffel Viljoen, and offered him work on the farm when they were released.

A murder charge was first brought against Swanepoel in 1846 as the result of the death of a Griqua, one Jan Hesqua. There was evidence

that Hesqua had been shot in the back by Swanepoel and wounded. Swanepoel then told his wretched victim to pray, and finished him off by fracturing his skull with a stone. Judge Menzies, the same judge who had sent Swanepoel to Robben Island doubted the main Crown witness, an accomplice who had turned Queen's evidence. Swanepoel was acquitted.

Several years passed, and there were many rumours of dark deeds on Swanepoel's farm. It was suggested that when a carpenter or painter had drawn his pay after working on the farm, Swanepoel sent his dogs after him and the man was torn to pieces. On other occasions Swanepoel would ride out after the departing workman on horseback, intercept him near the edge of a cliff and throw him over. Thus he recovered the money he had paid. There was also a suspicion that Swanepoel and Viljoen had murdered men out hunting for the sake of their guns and ammunition.

No doubt Swanepoel and Viljoen felt they were too clever to be caught. This delusion

was strengthened when they were both charged with cattle-theft and acquitted. One of Swanepoel's goatherds, Jan Willemse, gave evidence for the Crown. A fortnight later Willemse vanished and was never seen again. Everyone in the district knew that Willemse had been murdered, but there was no proof. Swanepoel was arrested. The Attorney-General declined to prosecute and he was released.

Further charges of stock theft were brought against Viljoen, but he was acquitted before judge Musgrave at the Circuit Court held at George. Then, in February 1856, Swanepoel was re-arrested on the charge of murdering the Hottentot goat-herd Jan Willemse.

The murderers had fallen out. Viljoen had been grumbling about the remoteness of the farm, and he had asked Swanepoel to pay his wages and let him go. Instead, Swanepoel had given him an ox which had strayed on to the farm. "If anyone asks any questions, say you are taking it to the pound", suggested Swanepoel.

The ox was recognized by the owner's brand, and Viljoen went for advice to Field Cornet Pieter Raubenheimer. This was a chance Raubenheimer had been awaiting for a long time. He persuaded Viljoen to turn Queen's evidence, and Viljoen made a long statement to the police at George.

Raubenheimer had to plan the arrest cleverly, for he knew that Swanepoel would shoot at sight if he suspected that Viljoen had given him away. He arranged with Head Constable Penn and two farmers to accompany him to the farmhouse. Viljoen was told to remain hidden until he heard a whistle. Raubenheimer informed Swanepoel that his party wished to hunt kudu, and they were all invited inside for a drink. They left their guns on the stoep. As Swanepoel raised his glass the four officers of the law overpowered him and bound his arms and legs.

Swanepoel begged to be allowed to change his clothes before leaving the farm. This plea was not granted, but Raubenheimer went into the

bedroom to find out why Swanepoel was so anxious to go in there. Against the wall were four muzzle-loaders, all ready for use with percussion caps on the nipples. So the escort left the farm with Swanepoel trussed up securely in a cart.

There was a preliminary examination by the Oudtshoorn magistrate, Colonel Armstrong, and then Swanepoel was taken to the old George *tronk*, a building which has vanished completely. Swanepoel spent each day locked in the stocks which stood in the gaol yard. He spent his nights in the strongest cell with a guard at the door.

Mr. Justice Cloete presided at the George Circuit Court that year. Swanepoel's wife and two children were in court. Grietje Kraaiyenstein, who had lived with the murdered goat-herd Willemse, described the events of the night when Willemse drank too much and aroused Swanepoel's rage. She had seen Swanepoel break Willemse's neck with his bare hands. "I heard the bones crack, just as a

stick cracks," she declared. Grietje risked her life by catching hold of Swanepoel's leg in an effort to pull him away. It was useless. Swanepoel took out his knife, cut Willemse's neck and left him lying dead. For three months Swanepoel kept Grietje inside his thorn-bush stockade so that she could not inform the police.

Viljoen, apparently, was not present at the murder, but his evidence was that Swanepoel had told him about it, remarking that he had buried Willemse, but the dogs had unearthed the corpse. They went together to the spot, and found an arm raised to heaven as though demanding vengeance. So they took the body of poor Willemse in a sack on horseback from that place and threw it into a deep hippo pool in the Gouritz River.

Swanepoel was ably defended by Advocate Laing from Cape Town, but the Crown case was too strong. The jury brought in the inevitable verdict, and Swanepoel was sentenced to death.

On the day of execution everyone in the district, white and coloured, converged on George to see the end of the man who had come to be known as the "Terror of the Outeniquas". The gallows were put together at the foot of York Street, and a low fence was built round the platform to keep the public at a suitable distance.

Down the street, beneath the oaks, came the cart drawn by two horses in which Swanepoel made his last journey. Next to the cart was a small posse of police. Outside the police rode thirty mounted volunteers. Swanepoel swung himself out of the cart and was accompanied to the gallows by two ministers, Kretzer and Dawson. The district surgeon and the hangman met Swanepoel at the fence. The last prayers were said, and then Swanepoel asked: "Has my reprieve not come from Cape Town?". He was told that there was no reprieve, Swanepoel was handed a white woollen cap, which he pulled over his eyes. Then the noose was placed round his neck, and the trap was sprung. The

execution took place on April 28, 1856; the last public execution held in George.

Six months later Chief Constable James Gavin of Oudtshoorn called on Swanepoel's widow to collect the quitrent due on Rietfontein farm. Mrs. Swanepoel showed him her husband's grave; for the body had been brought back to Rietfontein on an ox-wagon.

Gavin stayed the night. When he went to bed he thought of a previous occasion when he had visited Swanepoel to collect the quitrent which was in arrears. Rather to his surprise Swanepoel had paid him in gold. Gavin knew Swanepoel's reputation, and he had brought a pistol with him. When he went to bed, he barricaded his door with furniture. Someone tried to enter the room during the night. It was too much for Gavin. He climbed quietly out of the window with his pistol and the gold, saddled his horse and rode away. But on the farm Rietfontein were the unmarked graves of men who had not eluded the "Terror of the

Outeniquas". No one will ever know how many men he murdered.

An early Oudtshoorn photographer took a portrait of Swanepoel and his little daughter. If you go to Oudtshoorn museum you can study the face of the murderer; but it will not tell you much. The sadist looks nothing more than an affectionate, normal father.

Namaqualand still remembers the bloodshed on the road between Springbok and Clanwilliam in April 1869, when a party of handcuffed prisoners butchered their guards. There was an extraordinary sequel, too, which roused the scattered white people of this wilderness like the Bushman raids of old.

The ill-fated cavalcade, fifteen Bushman and coloured prisoners and their white escorts, were on their way to the Circuit Court at Clanwilliam. Special Constable Charles Crowley rode ahead on horseback. Then came a cart driven by another white special

constable, Petrus Coetzee. In the cart with the rations were three prisoners who were unable to walk, an old man, a cripple and a woman. Behind the cart marched the twelve male prisoners, handcuffed to each other, in charge of Constable Floris Risband and a special constable, Thomas Mulligan. Risband had his twelve-year old son with him, while the driver Coetzee was accompanied by a coloured servant.

Seven days later a post-cart driver found the bodies of Risband, Mulligan, Coetzee and the coloured servant beside the track leading to Lily fountain mission station. The cart was there, but the contents and the mules had disappeared. There was no sign of the prisoners. After the field cornet and district surgeon had visited the scene, a reward of £50 was offered for the arrest of the murderers.

It seems that the ringleader in the plot to kill the constables was Roman Brandrug, a Bushman, who had secured a knife before the party left Springbok gaol. One evening on the

road Crowley and the cart went ahead to an empty farmhouse where the escort intended to spend the night. Brandrug waited until the cart was out of sight, and gave the signal. First the prisoners surrounded Risband and beat him to the ground with their handcuffs. Then one of them cut his throat.

Now the prisoners had a rifle and ammunition, and the key to the handcuffs. They were free and armed, and within a few minutes Mulligan was dead. There was some delay while the prisoners debated the next step, and Coetzee the cart driver rode back to find out what had happened. They shot him dead, and marched on to the farmhouse.

Crowley came out of the front door just as the prisoners arrived. He was fired on and fell with a charge of slugs in the arm. Coetzee's coloured servant was the next to be attacked, and he was killed. The prisoners fully intended to murder Crowley and the boy Risband; but the woman who had travelled in the cart pleaded successfully for their lives. She also

prevented this desperate gang from setting fire to the farmhouse.

Crowley was alive when the post-cart driver found him, but he lost his arm as a result of the affair. The prisoners fled in a body towards the remote fastnesses of the Orange River mountains pursued by a small commando. Brandrug persuaded a few other coloured miscreants to join his gang, so that he had about twenty men under him, some of them armed. With this force he was able to beat off the first attempt by the commando to round up the murderers. This skirmish occurred in a narrow kloof on Hermanus Van Zyl's farm Haas Rivier. Brandrug robbed Van Zyl of thirty horses and eighteen head of cattle. And when the commando approached his hiding place in the kloof, Brandrug called out to them: "I cut the constable's throat and I shall not stop until the lost white man is dead."

So here was a little rebellion by a band of murderers in the far north of the colony. Van Zyl and other outlying farmers had to move

into Springbok for safety. The next commando that went out after Brandrug was much stronger.

In a lonely bend of the Orange River the commando leader, Jan Kok, cornered the runaways. Brandrug placed his men behind boulders, and the fight was carried on for hours, both sides firing. At last Jan Kok decided that the only way to make the arrests would be to advance behind the cover provided by a herd of cattle. This he did, and during the fighting at close quarters Roman Brandrug and most of his followers were killed. Two of the original party of prisoners were captured, Klass Vrolyk and Christian Jagers. They were tried and sentenced to death in Cape Town, though the "Cape Argus" had suggested a trial and execution at Springbok, where the moral effect would have been tremendous.

So there came a September dawn in 1869 when a gun was fired and the light showed the street crowded from end to end. Outside the gaol stood the whole Cape Town police force,

armed with swords. The newspapers reported that a number of "degraded females" had joined the crowd watching the proceedings.

The gallows had been set up on the gaol stoep the previous day. Soon after six Vrolyk and Jagers, with the gaol chaplain, walked up the steps to the gallows. The chaplain shook hands and stepped down, the nooses were adjusted and the hangman pulled the lever. The cruel drama that had opened on the road in remote Namaqualand had ended with one of the last public executions held in Cape Town.

Probably the most sadistic murderer ever known in Namaqualand in civilized times was William Genricks, gaoler at Springbok when Mr. William Charles Scully arrived there in 1886 as magistrate. Scully described this scandal as "the grimmest and most appalling experience of my official career."

Genricks called on the new magistrate on arrival, and Scully noted the ill-tempered face,

china-blue eyes and thin, cruel mouth. Genricks had been a sick-bay attendant in the Royal Navy, and later an attendant in the sick-bay Island lunatic asylum. He was small, lean and muscular.

When the official inspection of the gaol took place, Scully found that some of the prisoners looked sleek, while others were plainly emaciated. Scully came to a locked door, and ordered Genricks to open it. At first the gaoler refused on the ground that the yard beyond the door was empty. Then he fetched the key and the first page in the horror of Springbok gaol was revealed.

Scully found a living skeleton, an elderly coloured man covered with scars and ulcers, shivering in rags in the winter breeze. Genricks had been starving him to death. Scully sent the victim to hospital, put a police constable in charge of the gaol, and went home to consider the matter. That night Genricks came to Scully, cringing and begging for mercy. By day the sadist was insolent; but all his courage left him

when darkness fell, and he went down on his knees and sobbed.

During his next inspection of the gaol, Scully lined up the prisoners and assured them they had nothing more to fear. They told a story of a reign of terror such as Scully had never imagined; and they showed him their scars. In the gaol office Scully found records showing that fourteen deaths had occurred within eight months. No form of inquest had been held.

The acting district surgeon was a Dr. Fox of the Cape Copper Company at O'Okiep. Scully accused him of neglecting his duty. "My dear Mr. Scully", replied the doctor, "when I was with Lopez in Paraguay, I often, as I sat drinking my coffee at sunrise, saw five-and-twenty men marched out together to be shot. I don't value human life at that." He snapped his fingers.

Scully went on with his thorough investigation. He had bodies exhumed from three graveyards and turned a disused house into a mortuary. He

took statement after statement showing that men had been beaten with clubs, and their bones broken, while they were starving to death. Old men were drenched with water and forced to spend the night in bare cells wearing their wet clothes. A few well-fed prisoners had assisted Genricks in the daily routine of torture. According to the survivors, there had been more than fourteen deaths, and the official records were incomplete. Scully placed Genricks under arrest.

Unfortunately it was only possible to secure positive identification of three corpses. (The finger-print system had not come into use). Genricks appeared at the Criminal Sessions in Cape Town charged with these three murders. Dr. Fox, a Crown witness, shielded Genricks in order to cover up his own gross negligence. The ignorant prisoners were easily confused by the clever advocate for the defence. So the jury could find Genricks guilty only of common assault, and the judge sent him to prison for twelve months with hard labour.

Long afterwards, Scully wrote that he regarded Genricks as "a dweller in that undefined borderland between the sane and the insane, in which moral responsibility may or may not be held as binding." He wondered what happened to the sadist of Springbok gaol after he had served his sentence.

Crime on the karoo usually means stock-theft. They were hanging Hottentots for it a little more than a century ago, and white offenders of that period were transported from the Cape to Australia as convicts. Stock-theft, a hardy annual at all farmers' congresses, is a problem that has never been solved. It will remain as long as there is hunger - and a sheep with a throat to be cut.

A stock thief who was fondly remembered even by farmers he had robbed was Dirk Ligter of the Ceres Karoo. Dirk was a great runner, and it is said that he could escape from a policeman on horseback if the horse was a little

tired. He could hold his breath for minutes at a time, and often evaded pursuit by hiding beneath the surface of a vlei.

Dirk Ligter once proved his speed by racing after a pack of baboons and catching one by the tail. He was admitted to the Old Somerset Hospital in Cape Town in 1938, and the doctors who examined him marvelled at the strength of his heart. He died the following year at the age of seventy-eight.

Always in the Karoo story you will find individuals who tired of work on the plains and took to the mountains. Some managed to keep within the law, others could not. Among those classed officially as criminals was one Damon Perderuiter, a Griqua who preferred a free life in a cave on the heights to drudgery as a farm labourer.

Damon Perderuiter lived in the Hex River mountains during the nineties of last century. He could read and write, and often he came down from his solitude to buy the newspapers. If that

seems queer to you, compare the newspapers of those days with your sheets of today and you may understand. But it was not that reason alone which drove Damon to retreat from civilization in the prime of life and become a cave-dweller.

His cave in the face of a precipice could be reached only by a bold climber. It was protected by an overhanging rock, which made it almost invisible; and Damon made it more secure by building a clay wall. He could keep a roaring fire going inside without a glimmer showing in the valley. As a final precaution, Damon took care to approach his lofty home by many different routes, so that there was no beaten path to arouse suspicion.

It was snug up there in the cave. But a man must live, and Damon Perderuiter had a craving for meat which could be satisfied only by raiding the surrounding farms. He used stones to kill fowls, pigs, and sheep, and he could finish off an ox with his knife. Nothing was wasted. He was so powerful that he could reach his cave with a

whole sheep or pig on his back. When it came to beef, a leg at a time was enough.

No one suspected Damon of stock theft. His hiding place in Boskloof was so wild and remote that when he threw the remains of animals he had eaten out of his cave, leopards gathered below and Damon listened to them crunching the bones.

Damon never molested a human being. He was, in fact, a kindly man. One day he found a coloured woman drunk and incapable at the roadside; he took her wailing baby from her and carried it to her home.

Meat he never lacked, but he had to cut and sell firewood to buy other necessities. For years the hermit of Boskloof led his own life and satisfied his great meat hunger to the full.

Damon Perderuiter was caught at last, by a farmer who happened to be guarding his pigs when the lone raider arrived. The police made him lead them to his cave. They found the cave cushioned luxuriously with the skins of hundreds of sheep.

So the freedom-loving hermit had to serve a prison sentence. When he came out, the owner of Boskloof farm gave him work and a cottage. And when the day's work was done, there was nothing to prevent Damon Perderuiter from climbing up to his old home and revelling in past glories.

Another child of nature who did not fare so well and certainly deserved his punishment was Martinus Kleyn, a man of Hottentot Bushman blood. Kleyn, son of a labourer in the Oudtshoorn district. was a house-breaker. He was sentenced to hard labour on Robben Island about thirty years ago, but he escaped on a driftwood raft, paddled to Blaauwberg beach, came through the surf by a miracle, and made his way back to Oudtshoorn.

Kleyn dared not show himself in the village. He solved that problem by taking up residence in a cave in the narrow ravine leading into the Kansa valley. It was a perfect sanctuary, hidden by scrub. Perfect, so that a white game hunter named Tom Stevens, who often

occupied a shack in the valley, was unaware of Kleyn's presence. This was a tribute to Kleyn's precautions. He used bow and arrow when he needed meat, and he wore sheepskin slippers to hide his spoor. Tom Stevens often puzzled over the broad, confusing marks left in the sand by those slippers.

From this hiding place Kleyn sallied forth to satisfy his needs, and more. As a bow and arrow hunter he might have remained at liberty for years. He chose to break into stores and collect such articles as gold watches, knives and forks, clothing, tools and razors, all in large quantities. Among his loot was a Mauser rifle and cartridges. A demijohn of Congo brandy and a huge roll of tobacco were put to immediate use.

Martinus Kleyn was caught entering a store one night. The police, in their kindly way, persuaded the transgressor to lead them to his cave. You will remember that Damon Perderuiter had many skins to show. Kleyn's cave looked as though everything on a mail

order firm's list had arrived at once, from mandolines to spoons. Kleyn went back to prison for ten years.

Ten years later, unknown to the people in the Kansa valley, Kleyn was back in his cave. He had hidden his rifle and cartridges so well that the police had never found them. But the temptation to fire at a passing buck was something Martinus Kleyn could not resist. The shot betrayed him. He had the proceeds of a fresh robbery in the cave, and there the police found him - a foolish man who had gone back on his tracks. This time it was the indeterminate sentence for Martinus Kleyn. No doubt he often regretted that he had given up the silent bow and arrow.

Comparatively few white men resort to stock theft, though there were some daring horse-thieves last century. Scotty Smith (who arrived in South Africa in 1877 and died in 1919) was the greatest of them. It is not so widely known, perhaps, that an earlier Smith, an Englishman, made a name for himself on the Great Karoo

and elsewhere as a horse-thief and gaol-breaker.

The first mention I have been able to find of this William Smith was in a government notice in 1850, after he had escaped from the George gaol. Here is the description: "An Englishman about twenty-six years of age, five feet eight inches in height, black hair, black whiskers, brown eyes, snub nose, small mouth and round chin. He was dressed on the day previous to his escape in a blue pilot cloth hip jacket, striped waistcoat, white shirt, pair of white trousers. He took with him a leghorn hat, two pairs of blue moleskin trousers, one blue-striped waistcoat, one pair of Wellington boots and a blue cloak."

This mid-century highwayman escaped from the old Cape Town *tronk* in the Heerengracht on more than one occasion. He visited Fraserburg in 1859, a polished and genial rogue, well-dressed and well-mounted, carrying an assortment of stolen jewellery in his saddle-bags. Smith also showed the

admiring farmers a fine double-barrelled rifle and the latest pattern in revolvers. Everyone treated him as a hero. Many residents, especially the girls of the village, were shocked after his departure to hear that the police were after him.

Someone who had met him at this period remembered that Smith had rings on his fingers, a gold watch and chain -- and two revolvers in his belt. When paying for a round of grog he would often draw out a handful of gold, throw down a sovereign and tell the barman to keep the change. Sometimes he posed as "Sir John Williams". He lodged unrecognised with a hospitable police sergeant at Beaufort West. But a series of escapades in the Worcester district brought about his downfall and he was caught while hiding in the Rondebosch woods and sentenced to a long term of hard labour.

Bain's Kloof was being built by convicts at that time. Smith worked there, and the warders found it advisable to chain him to an iron ring

which is still to be seen cemented into a rock near the top of the pass. William Smith was found dead in 1862, and it was suspected that another convict had murdered him.

CHAPTER 18

THE LAND OF BEGIN AGAIN

HALF the Cape Province, I should say, is a blank in the minds of most South Africans. I am thinking of the North West Cape, of course, the last spaces to be mapped and surveyed and settled, the districts still unknown and mysterious to the traveller who keeps to the national roads.

In some parts of this vast, harsh country all the year's rain may fall in one shower. I was not surprised to hear it called "the land of begin again". Gently it rolls away westwards from the main railway line through the Great Karoo, a treeless land with few landmarks, often like an inland ocean. Much of it is sandy, with isolated granite koppies thrusting up from the red surface. You will find some of these plains

strewn with round black dolerite boulders. Here, too, is the *panneveld* with Verneuk Pan as the most remarkable example; and here are the *kolk* and *vloer* formations created by rivers which spread out over the flat country in rainy seasons. This is indeed the *Agterwêreld* - the world behind the busier world along the main railway line to the north. Prieska on the Orange River falls within the North-West Cape borders; so do the scorching plains of Bushmanland and the dusty but not always desperate villages of Prieska and Kenhardt, Carnarvon and Fraserburg, Sutherland, Williston and Calvinia.

I have slept under the stars on these plains often enough to feel the spell. The poet William Charles Scully regarded Bushmanland as one of the most complete solitudes on earth. He loved the empty spaces and found inspiration there. Yet there are some who form a very different impression, and their outlook was summed up by an intelligent though,

perhaps, too imaginative woman I met in a village on the plains.

"We live behind invisible bars, imprisoned by limitless space," she told me. "The earth is so flat that we long for the sight of a mountain. We are imprisoned by the plains of freedom. The space you admire so much makes us feel petty, and indeed we are small."

She declared that the winters were tolerable because the cold numbed hands and feet and feelings. In the summer every nerve was on edge and she felt cut off from the world. Day after day the killing sameness brought out the worst and the best in every man and woman. Always there was the veld, grim and relentless, silent and tired.

"Is there nothing you enjoy?" I asked her.

"Yes, one thing. Week after week in summer you have the long, stifling, dust-laden days when you cling to a life that has become a burden. There is just the heat, the dust, the iron bedsteads on which we sleep outside, tormented by insects. Then

comes a dramatic change in the weather, when a sudden thunderstorm drenches us as we lie asleep under the sky. That is a moment we enjoy. But it is lonely here, my friend, and we are modern people far from the crowd."

That was her view, and she was an Afrikaner woman, though not a daughter of the North West Cape. Scully, born in Dublin, went to school with Theal the historian, spent his boyhood years on a sheep farm and took part in the Kimberley diamond rush at the age of sixteen. I was first privileged to meet this grand writer on his eightieth birthday. He spoke wistfully of the wild border districts of the Cape Colony in the eighties of last century, and it was clear that the years had not weakened his affection.

He spoke of trekking at night to spare the oxen, with only one outspan of an hour at midnight. Often he walked beside the wagon, ankle-deep in sand, from sunset to sunrise, because the wagon was filled with water-casks. "Large yellow tarantulas swarmed in the gorges near the Orange River," he told me. "Sometimes they drove us

from our camp-fires, and once I was forced to wade through a side-stream and sleep on an island to avoid them."

In the desert Scully lived on coffee and *boerebeskuit* and grilled springbok liver. Sometimes he rode his elderly horse Prince at the gallop for ten miles without a check. Each dawn refreshed him, and he found new vigour in the strong sunshine of early morning. He was exhilarated by the sights and sounds of the plains, the voices of solitude from the clucking of a lizard to the jackal's howl. "I was close enough to the heart of solitude to hear its beats," he once wrote.

That day I asked Scully to reveal the secret of desert solitude, for this was his favourite theme. "Lush greenery and rich valleys may stir the emotions, but the desert arouses the intellect," the aged poet replied.

In the desert, Scully found himself invincible. He believed that all really great ideas had sprung from deserts; that the wilderness had ever been the storehouse of spiritual things. He gained

intellectual power in Bushmanland, and declared that he lost it in the land of corn and wine.

So I travelled in the tracks of the poet, wishing that I could see all that he had seen. The older one grows, the more one realizes how many precious memories vanish for ever with the death of every old person. I searched for the old people, and saw the past through their eyes.

I could remember easily enough the time when land in the north West Cape fetched half a crown a morgen, and farms of one hundred thousand morgen were not unknown. There was a true story of a trek Boer who camped on a farm with his flocks for six months before the owner discovered him. You could buy a sheep for four shillings and wool fetched three pence a pound.

The old people spoke of more spacious days than ever I had known. I met an eighty-year-old Prieska resident, Mr. Jasper van der Westhuizen, who was probably the first white

child to be born in the district. His father had come up from Oudtshoorn in the eighteen-fifties, helped himself to a three thousand morgen "request farm" free of charge, and bought additional land at a shilling an acre. In the end he and his sons owned nearly a quarter of a million acres.

Oom Jasper told me that in his youth he often rode a hundred miles through the Prieska and the present Kenhardt districts without seeing a farm house or meeting a single white person. It was not until 1870 that the first mud-building, a police station, appeared in Prieska.

A grim story, stranger than fiction, illustrates the great isolation in those days. The *veldkornet* at Prieska reported that a blue-eyed boy of European descent, with straw-coloured hair, was living with natives in the district and working as a shepherd. A native had said that the boy had been kidnapped in the Western Province some years previously, and the *veldkornet* suggested that the boy's relatives should visit Prieska in the hope of identifying

the lad. Major David Blair Hook, the Northern Border magistrate accompanied two male relatives of the lost boy to interview the young white shepherd.

"A wilder specimen of a herd I never had seen, with tangled locks and savage scowl, yet with deep blue eyes, fairest skin and features of the Saxon," reported Major Hook. "The two men from the Western Province would not, dared not claim him as their own, although the likeness to the missing child was striking. To bring back a wolf to where a lamb was nourished by its loving mother was a venture beyond their love."

It seems that the boy, speaking only a native language, denied his origin and claimed a native woman as his mother. He glared at Major Hook, but when given biltong he devoured it like a wild beast. The effort at identification had failed, and the boy was left in the kraal. This occurred at a time when diamonds had been discovered at Kimberley,

and the railway had reached Wellington. Prieska was still a remote wilderness.

Prieska is a corruption of the Koranna name Priskab, "the place of the lost she-goat". This was the safest drift across the Orange River for miles and the natural place for a village. Yet it was not until late last century that Prieska began to show, signs of activity. It was known to certain trekboers who went there in good years, when summer rain brought up the grass; but for a long time no white farmers wished to settle permanently in such a dry area. After rain the pans filled up, and that would keep the sheep going for months. Thus the pans became the most important landmarks - Hartbeespan, Jakomienpan, Brulpan, Eierdoppa, Wegsteekpan, Gelukspan, and every one of them with its own story.

People living in Prieska not so long ago remembered the first magistrate, a free-and-easy frontier type, holding his court in the open air under a large kameel-doring tree. When he had disposed of the work a *braaivleis*

was organized, everyone toasted the magistrate, and they danced to the music of a concertina. One of the Prieska characters of those days was a law agent named Proudfoot, who also dealt in patent medicines which he had invented. Proudfoot's pills and ointment had a great reputation among the trekboers.

Prieska became the railway terminus of the North West Cape half a century ago. Anyone with donkeys and a wagon could make a living as transport-riders; and when the Germans over the border went to war with the Hereros and Hottentots, the livestock and produce dealers and transport-riders made fortunes: At one period, however, leopards became so troublesome that even the horses in the village were being attacked. The farmers organized a commando and went up into the mountains with the intention of exterminating the enemy. Not a leopard was to be found.

West of Prieska is the Kaaing Bult, the "suet ridge", sprinkled with white quartz pebbles which reminded the early farmers of the lumps

of fat used for cooking. This area of sixteen hundred square miles is a land of pans and mirages, criss-crossed by the wagon tracks of generations of trekboers. Many years ago there was a farmer who owned ten thousand morgen of grazing in the Kaaing Bult. He wished to share it out among nine sons and sons-in-law, and about twenty years ago a surveyor set about the task. It was then discovered that the farm was eleven hundred morgen larger than the owner had supposed. The original surveyor had been deceived by the mirages.

Near the railway line beyond Prieska is a farm with the puzzling name of Draghoender. It should be Dragonder, the Afrikaans for dragoon; and the name goes right back to the days when a British cavalry regiment formed part of the Cape Town garrison, nearly a century ago. When the dragoons sold their horses, one of the buyers named his mount Dragonder and rode it into the North West Cape on a hunting expedition. The horse strayed, and he returned without it. Next year

he went hunting again, and found the horse where he had lost it. The horse had survived in that barren world by smelling water in a river bed and kicking up the sand until a fountain was revealed. This discovery made it possible for a farmer to settle there, and he named his farm Dragonder in honour of the horse. Hottentots corrupted it to Draghoender.

Still farther along the line is a station called Putzonderwater. Here, in the early eighties of last century, an old coloured man David Ockhuis decided to dig a well. His sons Hans and Gert helped him, and they opened up a good supply of fresh water. This well was of great importance in a land where the trekboers had to make long and dangerous journeys from one source of water to another in times of drought. Ockhuis knew very well that if he boasted about his water he would probably lose his farm; for the land in those days was absolutely free and few had any sort of lease or title.

Thus, whenever a trek Boer reached the spot, Ockhuis would tell him: "*Ja meneer, ek het 'n Put, maar dit is 'n put sonder water.*" (Yes sir, I have a well, but it is a well without water). By this device Ockhuis held on to his farm for a few years, and the familiar reply was the origin of the name Putzonderwater. Then, in 1886, the farm was leased to Peter Connan, a Scottish storekeeper at Draghoender. Ockhuis had to move away. Connan and his partner Liebenberg bought the farm, of twenty thousand morgen, for nine hundred pounds a few years later. The well which Ockhuis and his sons dug is now the site of a pumping station supplying Putzonderwater village and the railway locomotives. Peter Connan and his brother J.G. Connan (who joined him in the nineties) were pioneers who set a fine example in this far district. Descendants have carried on the family tradition.

Putzonderwater is the station for Kenhardt, fifty miles away to the west. Every year Mr.

‘Tickey’ Loxton of Kenhardt sends me a parcel of springbok biltong in memory of the days when I stayed at his hotel and listened to the tales of the district in his friendly bar.

The Loxtons were among the pioneers in those parts. The district was only proclaimed as part of the Cape Colony shortly before the middle of last century; and for decades after the proclamation it remained no-man's-land where Koranna raiders and other dangerous Hottentot bands plundered the cattle of peaceful half-breed nomads and often murdered the Bastards as well. Later a lawless type of Bastard appeared, the result of unions between white runaway criminals and coloured women. Such a band, led by Barend Barends, enslaved certain Hottentots and Bushmen and terrorised huge areas.

Thus the village of Kenhardt started as a police station, with the constables camping under the kameel-doring tree which still stands in Gibbons-street. There was so much fighting that permanent settlement was delayed, and

farms were not given out until the eighteen-eighties. Bushmen added to the hazards; in 1884 two white farmers, Jan Buckle and Henning Claassens, were killed by poisoned arrows. As late as 1902 police armed with machine-guns had to go into the mountains along the Orange River to deal with coloured bandits under Koos Bontbors.

Kenhardt village appears to have been founded in 1876, when the Kerkraad at Carnarvon received ground for a church and school. Services were held at first in a reed hut on the site of the present hotel; and the Rev. W.P. (‘Blou Willem’) de Villiers visited the trekboers. In those early days the nearest railway station was Hutchinson. Even when the line reached De Aar the donkey-wagons took six weeks to carry the sheep and goatskins to the railway and return to Kenhardt with groceries and other trade goods. Horses and live sheep were sent across country to the diamond fields and later to Johannesburg; and

this was a profitable business for the remote Kenhardt farmers.

The name Kenhardt is a deep mystery. Years ago in 'Tickey' Loxton's bar I was told there was an old hunter of that name, but no one seemed to know anything about him. Later research at the magistrate's office revealed a police officer named Kenhardt. Strange to say, there was also some evidence to show that the village was known as Kenhardt long before Kenhardt arrived. I also heard an ingenious explanation which brought in an aged coloured woman who lived on the site of the village before any white people settled there. She was hospitable to white travellers, giving them a clean hut to sleep in, so that in later years many remembered her. They would say: "*Ek ken haar graf*" (*I know her grave*). From the Afrikaans words "*Ken haar*" the name of the village is supposed to have been derived. It is not a completely satisfying theory. I wish that I could find traces of old man Kenhardt. If he

ever lived, he must have been an adventurer worthy of that wild frontier district.

I did meet a man who had been based on Kenhardt as a Cape Police trooper in 1897 but he could not solve that riddle. One event he remembered was a cloudburst which wrecked the Kenhardt cemetery and carried it into the three wells supplying the village. Typhoid appeared, and my friend the trooper was among the victims. "They fed me on *askoek* and grated biltong, and it was six weeks before I had a proper meal," he recalled. "I daresay it was a good diet, but I have never wanted to taste biltong again." Kenhardt, as the result of a tragedy, has a claim to fame which may have been forgotten. As recently as 1912 a young farmer in the district was killed by a lion. I think this must have been the last lion in the country south of the Orange River to take a human life.

Late last century there was a Bushman in the Kenhardt district who clung proudly to a *hardebolkeiltjie* hat, a bowler bearing the

inscription. "Made expressly for H.R.H. the Prince of Wales." This old Bushman also possessed a morning coat made by the royal tailor. His name was Klaas Velletjies and he worked as shepherd for a farmer named Wolhuter.

In some way which I have never been able to discover, Klaas Velletjies was sent to England with his wife and child. This queer trio appeared before Queen Victoria. and the Prince of Wales presented Klaas with the clothes I have mentioned. Klaas often related his court experiences round the camp-fire, but the deepest impression he carried away from England with him was of the Smithfield market. He had never imagined that there was so much meat in the world.

When you are finding your way over these brown wastes with a large-scale map you will observe that old Hottentot names have survived in many little places, fitting the weird country better than the English village names. Here is Oeboeboegorra, the "tiny waterhole"; a

dry river called Ibequa, meaning "the murderers", and Khamasas, "the fountain of the lions".

Afrikaans names in these lonely districts are picturesque and often poetic, though many origins are hard to guess. Rusiemaak was the scene of a forgotten quarrel, jokes were told at Grappies, and at Rugseer someone had a sore back. But what happened at Stilstaan-en-afspring to make the old rider stop and jump off his horse? The farm Keelafsnij, I know, was the place where the rebellious Korannas cut the throat of the unfortunate magistrate named Maximilian James Jackson. Kombersbrand must be the spot where someone's blanket caught fire. Dwaalgees (erring or wandering spirit) sounds like a queer story that is lost for ever. I can imagine the revelry at Kantienpan easily enough, and the peace at Stilverlaat (quietly deserted). Vraweer (ask again) is still a riddle to me, but I have solved Rokoptel (pick up the skirt). A peculiar thorn grew on this farm after rain and caught in the

long dresses of the women if they were not careful.

Drive almost due south from Kenhardt for a hundred and forty miles, and you come to Carnarvon. This was named after Lord Carnarvon, and has no other link with the Welsh seaport.

Among the pioneer settlers on these dusty plains was a romantic figure indeed, the Polish adventurer Jan Latsky. This giant had served in a Cossack regiment against Napoleon. He had seen Moscow burning, and bore the scars of a bullet wound in the shoulder and a sabre slash on the forehead. After fighting at Waterloo he landed without a penny in Cape Town in 1821 and looked round for work.

He was fifty-four, and his wounds troubled him at times; but he knew how to handle horses and served a Paarl doctor as groom for three years. Then he moved northwards with a buggy and two horses, earning a living as a smous. The wide karoo gripped him, and there

he made up his mind to spend the rest of his days.

Jan Latsky was sixty when he secured a farm of eleven thousand morgen, ten miles from where Carnarvon now stands. He named the place Celeryfontein because wild celery grew there, built a stone house with loopholes for defence, opened up fountains, planted trees and made stone kraals for his stock. Several years later he married, and two sons were born. He died in December 1867 at the age of one hundred years and five months, and was buried on the farm. Justus Latsky, composer of "Karoo-land", great-grandson of the old soldier, farmed Celeryfontein in recent years.

Carnarvon is close to the Kareeberg, on the route followed by the old explorers and traders beyond across the Orange River to the land of the Bechuanas. Rhenish missionaries started work in the district in the eighteen-forties, the Rev. C.W. Alheit and others. One station set up for the Bastards was Schietfontein, often mentioned by travellers of the period.

Lichtenstein, who was there earlier, described the long, gaping valleys, where not a tree or a bush was to be seen. He said the whole country was like the sea in a violent storm, when the waves rise to mountainous height.

About one mile to the east of Schietfontein was another Rhenish station, Harmsfontein, where a number of Xhosa families settled. Harmsfontein became Carnarvon, though the name was not changed until 1874. In the seventies there were not more than a dozen white families on the spot, and the whole district produced only a few hundred bales of wool a year. You could lease a farm from the government for five pounds a year or buy a huge sheep run for a hundred pounds. Thirty years later the same farm would have been worth thousands.

Great efforts were made to find oil in the Carnarvon district between 1907 and 1921, and one borehole on the lonely farm Dubbeldevlei reached a depth of five thousand feet. Belief in oil was based on a geologist's

theory that many thousands of years ago there existed a great oil basin below the Karoo. It may have been shattered by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions; but the syndicate which sank thousands of pounds at Dubbeldevlei thought the oil was still there. Dr. Wagner of the Geological Survey described the unhappy enterprise as a "courageous and honest attempt". In his opinion the oil that reached the surface came from the grease used by the boring machine. Thus, after fourteen years, the work was abandoned and only the rusting machinery tells the tale of the borehole that never gushed oil.

Thirty miles north of Carnarvon on the Prieska road you pass through the farm Carel Krieger's Graf. The name recalls one of the greatest dramas of the North West Cape, in the days when outlaws fled beyond the borders of the colony leaving only legends of their adventures.

Carel Krieger (really Kruger) was an antecedent of President Paul Kruger. He and

his brother Jacob were born and brought up in the Roggeveld; and in 1776 Carel was appointed *Veldwagmeester* of the Klein Roggeveld. He carried out road repairs and organized the defence against Bushmen raiders.

It was said that the Kruger's possessed such mechanical skill that they could make anything. Carel, unfortunately, chose to carve two wooden dies for stamping rixdollar notes closely resembling those issued by the Dutch East India Company. Jacob carried some of these forgeries to Cape Town and bought guns and knives, ploughs and sail-cloth and buckskin trousers. He was arrested, but escaped.

Orders were sent to the Veld Corporals of the Roggeveld for the arrest of the brothers, but these officials failed to act. They explained that Carel Kruger was a man of hasty temper, well supplied with arms, who might endanger their lives; and added that they were not obliged to arrest a fellow burgher. Meanwhile

the Kruger brothers disappeared into the unknown north, Carel taking his wife and family with him. They were tried in their absence, the prosecutor claiming sentence of "death by the cord" for Carel; while Jacob, as an accessory, was to be beaten and branded on the gallows and then imprisoned for fifteen years.

Carel Kruger found a safe base in a distant, inaccessible kloof which he called Kruger's Kraal. The brothers lived as hunters along the Orange River, gaining the confidence of the natives and roaming where no white men had ever set foot before. They made their own gunpowder, worked copper ore and cast copper bullets in stone moulds. Whenever they shot any animal they cut out the bullets for use over and over again.

It was in 1791 that Carel Kruger wounded an elephant near the Kareeberg range, on the farm which now bears his name. He was trampled to death. No doubt his brother was with him; and it is probable that two other outlaws, Jan

Meyer and Anthony Botes, were in the neighbourhood. Meyer, a Roggeveld farmer, had been serving a sentence on Robben Island, but he had made a crude boat, reached the mainland, and struck inland to join the Kruger's in the wilderness.

Carel Kruger's estate, according to a document in the Stellenbosch archives, consisted. of only a few hundred rixdollars in cash, but he and his wife owned a female slave, nearly seven hundred sheep, a wagon, oxen, five horses and three guns.

Ten years after Carel's death an expedition which included Petrus Borchardus Borchers reached the Orange River where Prieska now stands. There they found the missionary Edwards and his family and Jacob Kruger. A few years later, after the Second British Occupation, an act of amnesty permitted Jacob to return to the colony. He settled on a Roggeveld farm; but it seems that the pardon had been granted on condition that he acted as guide to an expedition led by Dr. Cowan in

search of a route to Mozambique. The whole party was either massacred or died of fever; though it was believed in the Kruger family that Jacob Kruger was killed by a lion in the Kalahari.

Dr. E.E. Mossop, who traced the careers of many early Krugers, lamented the fact that Jacob Kruger had kept no diary of his wanderings in the unknown regions beyond the Orange River between 1783 and 1805. Had he done so, he might have gained a place for himself among the South African explorers. Lichtenstein, however, left this description of the man: "He spoke little and laughed seldom, knew no fear: his deep-set eyes, long grey hair and great beard lent him a threatening appearance. He carried a short thick elephant-gun carrying bullets weighing quarter of a pound."

The Rev. D.R. Kannemeyer found a son of Carel Kruger in 1861 living near Fraserburg. The son, then over eighty, had inherited the family mechanical skill. He had built himself a

house of cut stone, and the farmers always brought their guns to him for repair. Kannemeyer added that in 1891, descendants of the Krugers were still in possession of the farm Leeuwfontein in the Fraserburg district.

On the railway between Carnarvon and Calvinia is another village that started as a mission station - Williston, formerly Amandelboom. About seven hundred Bastards were trekking from fountain to fountain to the west of the Kareeberg during the eighteen-forties. Many of them had known white fathers; and having been brought up as Christians they asked the Rhenish missionaries at Wupperthal in the Cedarberg to send them a leraar.

Two missionaries, Lutz and Beinecke, arrived in 1845 and pitched their tents by a strong fountain in the shadow of a wild almond tree; hence the name Amandelboom. Other Bastards trekked from all sides to join the congregation. When white settlers came into the area from

Clanwilliam in 1860, however the Bastards began moving out. For many Bastards, the liquor sold by transport riders was an irresistible temptation, and they parted with their farms for cases of brandy. These were the Bastards who trekked northwards with their cattle and horses, accompanied by the Rev. J.C.F. Heidemann, to settle finally at Rehoboth⁵ in South West Africa. Others found a new home in the Kalahari and made a living as hunters. Amandelboom changed its name in 1883, when the municipality was formed. Mr. Hampden Willis was a Cape Government official. The pioneers, such men as Dawid Louw, Johannes Theron and Hendrik Esterhuyse, owned enormous farms, all over thirty thousand morgen. Karakul sheep were introduced as far back as 1920 by the late Mr. N.F. Hodgson.

⁵ See "Lords of the Last Frontier" by Lawrence G. Green (Timmins), for the story of the Rehoboth "republic" in South West Africa.

About eighteen years ago a primary school teacher, Mr. J.H. Swart, decided to transform Williston and the district by a tree planting campaign. His pupils helped, and the village and district now have twenty thousand trees which might have remained unplanted if it had not been for Mr. Swart's enthusiasm.

Fraserburg, south of Carnarvon, was another of those districts which remained empty for a long time because of the Bushman menace. I have traced a grazing licence given to Dirk Marks as far back as 1741, his farm Driefontein being described as the "verlaatene plaats" of the widow Bezuidenhoud. That was in Governor Swellengrebel's time, and Dirk Marks had to produce two good four-year-old oxen every year to retain his licence.

But there came a period when all the white trekboers were driven out by the Bushmen. It was not until early last century that the first permanent settlers moved in and took the risk of Bushman arrows. Some paid heavily for their courage.

Two large Bushman clans lived within raiding distance of the farmers. They wiped out the Naude family, the father and mother and two children and all the coloured servants with the exception of one young girl. This survivor carried the news to the nearest white people, and a strong commando set out in pursuit. One party of Bushmen were located from the Ezelberg (named after the mountain zebra); they were feasting on stolen cattle among the reeds round the spring on the present Fraserburg site. The commando dealt with them, and passed on to attack the main force of the enemy at Blauheuvel. So many Bushmen were killed in the dawn attack that the bodies were placed in a cave and walled up. This cave is now part of the farm Wagenmakersvallei, and many years afterwards the sons of the farmer, Dirk van Schalkwyk, found the skulls and bones. These remains were then given proper burial.

As a village, Fraserburg only passed the century mark a few years ago. It was in 1851

that forty-two members of the Rev. Colin Fraser's congregation met on the farm Rietfontein and decided to build a church there. That was the period when members of the Dutch Reformed Church were honouring their Scottish ministers by naming new villages after them.

The original Rietfontein homestead survives among the houses in Fraserburg village. It was a tranquil place after the defeat of the Bushmen, with only the ordinary events of South African life to disturb the routine from time to time. I found a record of an old farmer, Swarts, and his ten-year-old son being killed by lightning during the early years of the village.

The isolation of the Fraserburg district in the eighteen-sixties impressed the Rev. James O'Haire, a Roman Catholic priest who travelled the *agterwêreld* in search of scattered members of his flock. On a lonely farm to the north of the village O'Haire discovered a Belgian named Francis Feres. This man had

been in South Africa for forty-five years, and was a white-bearded patriarch, nearly a hundred years old, when O'Haire met him. Feres had married a Hottentot, but his wife had died.

"He was blind and very deaf, but his intellect was unimpaired," O'Haire recorded. "He lived in a twig hut, and food was sent to him daily by the farmer he had served as a shepherd. Feres had been religious in his youth, but he had never met a Catholic priest since his arrival in South Africa. He wept when I made myself known and I heard his confession. Just before I left next day he died."

It was so cold in the winter of 1869 that ice remained on the Fraserburg dams until midday, although the sun was shining. Sheep perished in thousands during the inevitable droughts, and in 1884 the distress was so severe that four coloured people starved to death.

"Fraserburg was on the road to nowhere, and for that reason it missed - or escaped - various

forms of excitement," an old resident explained to me. Nevertheless, this remote village played a, noteworthy part in the development of the Afrikaans language. It was there that a law agent, an Englishman named H.W.A. Cooper, wrote a series of farmers' letters in a pioneer form of Afrikaans, and these were published in the "Volksblad". There is no doubt that this effort as far back as 1870 provided some of the inspiration which led to the movement for the adoption of Afrikaans as a written language. Cooper used the pen-name of "Samuel Zwartman", and published one pamphlet entitled "Kaapse Schetsen".

Most of the North West Cape villages share a family resemblance in which corrugated iron roofs and windmills are prominent features. Fraserburg, however, is distinguished by a piece of architecture which has no twin elsewhere. This is the celebrated "Peperbus" - the "pepper-box" on Market Square in the middle of the village.

They say that Fraserburg without its pepper-box would be like Cape Town without Table Mountain. This odd landmark is a six-sided stone building, twenty-eight feet high, with a six-sided tower on the dome of the main structure. It has one door and one window, and an arrow-shaped weathercock on the summit.

Fraserburg's first resident minister, the Rev. Carel Bamberger, designed the peper-box, and it was built in 1861 by a clever Bastard artisan named Adam Jacobs. The tiny building served as town hall, while fruit and vegetables were displayed on the stoep. There were some criticisms of this unambitious effort at the time, however, for it was alleged that the local authorities had spent £110 more than their annual income on a "so-called town house" while dams and street repairs were needed urgently.

A bell in the pepper-box tower announced the opening of the market and also tolled the curfew at nine each night when coloured people had to be indoors. The constable who rang the bell complained about his nightly climb into the tower, and

so the bell was taken down and hung between stone pillars beside the pepperbox. Long after the curfew was abolished, Fraserburg people set their watches by the nine o'clock bell.

Once the Fraserburg magistrate used the pepper-box as his office. It became the village library in 1866, then the town clerk's office and later the church office. Polling for municipal elections took place there, and now it is lit by electricity and used by the school board. No wonder there was a public outcry some years ago when it was proposed to demolish the historic pepper-box. Its defenders declared that it was the "heart of Fraserburg", and this monument was saved.

Fraserburg has another local peculiarity, the *damvakansie* custom. At a meeting of the town council in 1899 it was decided that a public holiday would be declared on every occasion when the town dam overflowed. When the new dam was built in 1918 the custom was continued. Three times since then the town clerk has paid a personal call on the heads of all business houses and notified them of the holiday.

Farmers in the Fraserburg district have long dreamt of diamonds. Back in the early eighteen-seventies a hunter named Dirk Burger shot a Pou and discovered a diamond (valued at £74) in the crop. Many a bustard was brought down after that episode, but the flesh of this fine game-bird was the only reward. Prospectors searched a number of farms without success shortly before World War I; yet in 1918 another find was made. This time a coloured shepherd picked up a white diamond of about four carats on the farm Goedeveerwagting. It fetched over £100, and a diamond rush again seemed possible. The experts, however, decided that it must have been brought by a bird from the alluvial diggings.

Sutherland, a typical, century-old North West Cape village with broad streets and pepper trees, is the capital of the Roggeveld Karoo. It was named after the Rev. Henry Sutherland, who arrived in South Africa at the same time as Colin Fraser of Fraserburg.

Until a few years ago Sutherland was officially rated as the coldest place in the Union, but I believe this honour has gone to Belfast in the Transvaal, by three decimal points of a degree. Nevertheless, you will find Sutherland every bit as cold as Dawson City or Vladivostock on certain winter nights. The village is nearly five thousand feet above sea level, and there may be a hundred nights a year when the temperature falls below freezing point. Snow lies six feet deep in the drifts, and you may have trouble on the run to the railway line at Matjesfontein, eighty miles away. However, the regular winter snowfall makes it possible to grow tulips profitably, if that is any consolation.

Lichtenstein found it cold in the Roggeveld during November, and pointed out that the cattle had to be taken to the lower altitude of the Great Karoo in winter. It was a memorable picture this traveller drew of the Karoo as a flower garden, with the Roggeveld colonists descending from the snowy mountains with

their herds and flocks to find the plains covered with wholesome food for the animals. Troops of ostriches and wandering antelope, also driven from the heights, shared the repast. "Long-separated friends and relations see each other again, are neighbours for a time and enjoy a life of quiet and content," Lichtenstein wrote. "Sheep are never lost, no ox or cow falls down the precipice; cattle feed secure from the lion, tiger, hyena, since there is no cave where they may hide." After about a month of this idyllic life the flowers faded, streams dried up, and the Roggeveld people returned to their heights. They went reluctantly, the sheep lingering to feed on the succulents.

Lichtenstein pointed out that rye (roggen in Nederlands) was not cultivated in the Roggeveld. The name referred to a species of grass resembling rye, which the colonists called wild rye. Thunberg also mentioned the wild rye growing in abundance.

Yet when South African botanists in recent years searched for the wild rye of the Roggeveld, they had great difficulty in locating it. Apparently the tasty and nourishing wild rye had been almost exterminated by the cattle of the district. Russian and Swedish scientists have been searching the globe for wild perennial plants to use in crossing experiments with ordinary grain varieties. The wild rye, lost and forgotten since Lichtenstein's day, became important.

Mr. H. Jooste, school principal in Sutherland., took part in the search and forwarded a number of samples to the University of Pretoria. There is a wild barley in the district which is easily confused with wild rye; but at last Mr. Jooste found a plant on Mr. W.A. Booysen's farm Voëlfontein which the experts identified as the original wild rye.

Wild rye looks very much like cultivated rye. It grows to a height of four feet or more, with thin stalks and delicate ears. Only the oldest

farmers in the district remember the days when this *wilde rog* was plentiful.

Only twelve miles south-east of Sutherland village is a rare sight in South Africa, an extinct volcano. This is Saltpetre Kop, a conical hill nearly six thousand feet above sea level and one thousand feet above the dreary plain. My friend Denis Woods, who never misses an unusual climb, visited this isolated relic of ancient eruption and noted the satellites scattered round it. "Only the fitful moan of the wind disturbs the still, silent wastes," Denis recorded. "In the summer all is blackened, grim, forbidding in the shimmering heat. A good winter's snowfall covers it all in a thick mantle."

To the west of Sutherland village lie the Roggeveld mountains. There, before the great drought of the early nineteen-thirties, lingered a few troops of the rare mountain zebra. They were shot off by hungry bywoners and farm labourers, for they were in poor condition owing to lack of grazing and were easy victims. It was tragic that such a need for food should have arisen; tragic,

too, that the last of the species in the district should have vanished in this way.

Mr. Bernard Carp of Cape Town, leader of many natural history expeditions, went in quest of survivors in 1950. He was informed by a farmer named Cloete that the last known mountain zebra had been shot in 1934 - an old stallion which had been running with the mares and donkeys on Cloete's farm. It became too rough for the farm animals and was shot when it entered the kraal one night with the mares.

Cold and lonely the Sutherland district can be, with its memories of the wild past. The spirit of it can be found in Lichtenstein's narrative, especially in his account of a night spent at Tondeldoosfontein (the spring of the tinder-box plant), one of the old Kruger farms.

"On the highest point of this widespread, desolate mountain plain we found under the shelter of a broken natural wall of rock a small hut, a herdsman's abode, while tending his master's cattle at the dry season of the year, when they are

sent into these cooler regions," Lichtenstein said. "Open and standing empty, it gave welcome shelter from the wind that blew over the mountains. Four fragments of rock formed a table, and we set out our cold provisions, wine and bread. Our tents were frozen in the night."

As a contrast with Lichtenstein's wanderings in the Roggeveld, it is interesting to recall that the isolation of the Sutherland district was responsible for South Africa's first air mystery. I have reason to remember this episode, for I had been flying in the airliner that went missing, and I almost accompanied it on its last flight.

It was in February 1920, a time when thousands of South Africans had never seen an aeroplane. This machine, a wartime Handley-Page bomber fitted with passenger seats and windows, was the first twin-engined aircraft to be flown in the Union, and it was named "Pioneer".

I flew round the Cape Peninsula and as far as Saldanha in the "Pioneer" with Major Henry

Meintjes and Lieut. C.W. Meredith at the controls. Then it was announced that the "Pioneer" would carry passengers and mails from Cape Town to Johannesburg, a flight that no one had yet accomplished. Major Meintjes was in charge of the attempt, with Captain C.J. Venter as second pilot and five members of the Handley-Page staff on board. Mrs. Meintjes was the only woman passenger, but three Cape Town business men paid one hundred pounds a head for the privilege of taking part in the historic flight.

All along the route people gazed into the sky to catch a glimpse of South Africa's first air liner. Farmers waved from the Paarl vineyards and the orchards of Wolseley. But beyond Ceres people waited in vain. "Pioneer" had vanished. When the air liner failed to arrive at Beaufort West, the first fuelling station, the authorities became anxious. For three days there was silence. Broadcasting was unknown. There were no other aeroplanes capable of searching the huge area of karoo involved. The fate of the "Pioneer" became the great topic of conversation throughout the Union.

Meintjes told me the story. He climbed almost to the "ceiling" of his primitive air liner to clear the Hex River mountains, and soon ran into cloud. He preferred cloud to sharp mountain peaks, so he flew high and blind until he knew from his dead reckoning that he had left the mountains astern. Remember that in those days he had no weather reports to help him and no radio to guide him towards his destination.

By the time the "Pioneer" had emerged from the clouds Meintjes had lost his way. He had hoped to follow the railway line, a trick all the early pilots relied upon, but his compass had been affected and when he looked down he saw only the unfamiliar wastes of the Roggeveld. Meintjes knew that he would have to land and discover his position before the petrol gave out. At last he decided that it would be unsafe to continue the search for the railway line. He chose an open stretch of veld and put the "Pioneer" down neatly.

Soon a farmer approached the air liner. He did not seem greatly surprised, and possibly he was a humorist, for he asked one question: "Is

the war over?" Meintjes was able to reassure him on that point. From the farmer Meintjes learned that he had landed on the farm Blaauwheuvcl, forty-five miles from Sutherland. Very few farmers owned motor-cars at that time, and the nearest petrol was in Sutherland village. It was a Sunday morning. The petrol did not reach that remote farm until the Tuesday evening. Only then did the stranded airman know that the deep anxiety about their disappearance had been allayed. Meintjes crashed later at Beaufort West. No one was injured, but the "Pioneer" never reached Johannesburg.

Calvinia's old name was the Hantam, a Hottentot word meaning "land of *uintjies*." Several varieties of these nutty little bulbs are found in the Hantam mountains. White settlers reached the Hantam through the Olifant's River valley before the middle of the eighteenth century. They were not so much interested in *uintjies* as in the great variety of shrubs for

sheep; *skaapbos* and *karoobos*, *brakbos* and *gannas*, *blomkool* and Bushman grass.

The man who chose the present Calvinia site for his farm was a Van Wyk, and the homestead he built just over two centuries ago, Akker en Dam, stands unchanged on the edge of the town. With walls four feet thick and low, heavy beams, it may well last for another two hundred years. Lichtenstein stayed with Field Cornet Abraham van Wyk in this house very early last century.

The largest estate in the district at that time was owned by Jacobus van Renen, a romantic character who had taken part in an attempt to salve the Grosvenor's treasure. Van Renen was a wealthy man, a capable artist and expert horse-breeder. It is believed that a Bushman, as an act of gratitude, showed Van Renen a safe place to keep his horses near a spring on the Hantam mountain summit. Other farmers suffered from raids by Bushmen, but Van Renen kept an excellent stud, including an



"White settlers reached the Hantam through the Olifants River valley before the middle of the eighteenth century." (*Chapter Eighteen.*)

Arabian horse valued at three thousand rixdollars, and only lost a few colts which were pulled down by hyenas.

Lichtenstein noted that meat was the main food of the Hantam, for it was cheaper than bread. Every herdsman ate a sheep a week, and three or four sheep were killed daily for a household of twenty people. Van Renen grew some wheat and many vegetables, and he had six hundred peach trees in that remote district. The farmers were pleased to see such a high official as General Janssens, and brought presents of game and other items of food which were courteously given and thankfully received. The visitors were surprised to find so much good breeding and civility among people living in a "dry and solitary country, fit only for the feeding of cattle, and half-encircled by some of the wildest among the savages of the neighbouring districts."

Indeed it was a long time before the Bushmen raiding came to an end. Even in the eighteen-seventies there were areas to the north of

Calvinia where travellers needed an armed escort. Fifty years later it would have been difficult to have collected half a dozen Bushmen in the whole area south of the Orange River. However, I do remember one fine, pure-blooded little fellow named Kanna who ended his days in Calvinia. Like many other wizened, apparently aged Bushman, he was said to be a centenarian. I suppose Kanna was at least seventy when he passed away.

It was in 1851 that the "new Hantam village" was named Calvinia. An early magistrate named Truter took advantage of Calvinia's remoteness by entering into business on his own account. He wound up estates, handled the legal affairs of the farmers and accepted fees - until a Parliamentary committee of inquiry put a stop to these activities.

Calvinia became a metropolis every nagmaal. In October 1878, for example, there were five hundred wagons and Cape carts and six thousand people in the little village. A bazaar in aid of the Dutch Reformed Church brought

in £1,900. It was estimated that the trekboers visiting Calvinia spent £20,000. This cluster of houses in the shadow of the Hantam mountain was the only village in the largest district in the colony.

Today, of course, Calvinia is no longer regarded as an isolated outpost. Hundreds of tourists drive up from Ceres or Clanwilliam during those years when the spring wild flowers appear. Calvinia has its own karoo garden, thousands of tons of rock and soil displaying the vygies, euphorbias and aloes of the district.

All this time I have been approaching the oldest settled district in the North West Cape. This is the Bokveld round about Nieuwoudtville, thirty-eight miles west of Calvinia. To the south are the Warm Bokkeveld and the Cold Bokkeveld. This is the one and only Bokveld, a favoured stretch, with its rainfall of fifteen inches. It has been called "the Boland of the North West". Certainly it forms a

contrast with the grey karoo vlaktes which can be seen from the heights in the district.

Early in this journey into the "land of begin again" I mentioned the place names, as queer as any you will encounter in South Africa. In the Bokveld there are still many names of Bushman and Hottentot origin, while the Afrikaans names recall vividly enough the glamour and the freedom and the dangers of the adventurous past. Bloedsuiersfontein makes me wonder what sort of bloodsucker operated there. Red-my suggests a cry for help. Oorlogskloof was the scene, no doubt, of a battle with a Bushman clan. Brandewynvlei has a pleasant sound. Lys-se-kloof was the home of an old coloured woman named Lys who clung to that lonely place with a few head of cattle for years after her husband's death. Warmviool is the one that still baffles me. Why was a farm named "hot violin"?

CHAPTER 19

FORGET THE DRY YEARS

ONCE there were visionaries who expected to see the North West Cape producing millions of bags of wheat every good season. If this gamble had been successful, South Africa could have had the cheapest bread on earth.

You may find it hard to imagine mile after mile of wheat flaming across a Karoo landscape. Yet I have seen the Sakrivier valley looking more like Manitoba than anything I had expected to see in such places as Bakoond, Tontelbos and Kotjieskolk. Perhaps the great experiment was carried out too soon; but when weather forecasting achieves greater accuracy the Sakrivier area may still become South Africa's granary.

In a good year, no other district can grow such rich wheat. One wheat plant has been known to produce five hundred ears, up to nine inches in length. If you try asparagus or fruit or

vegetables the crops are gigantic; thirty-pound cauliflowers and ninety-pound watermelons.

Men have been taking chances with the flood waters of the Sakrivier and its tributaries for a century and a half. The farming system you see here is that of the Nile delta and the plains of India, but in the North West Cape they call it the saaidam system, the "sowing dam". When it comes off, one bag of seed will cover eight acres. Green wheat turns a darker green, and then the earth is alive with waving gold. There are many hazards, but while the flood waters flow the wheat usually flourishes and the saaidam farmer remains happy.

Queer rivers you find in this dry country. They rise in the Roggeveld and Nuweveld mountains - the Fish, the Riet, the Renoster and Sak - and wander northwards over the sloping table-land to join the Hartbees and finally the great Orange River. But these streams that flood across the Williston, Calvinia and Kenhardt districts often have no well-defined channels. The map which was accurate last year may be hopelessly

misleading next wet season. One at least of these rivers did not exist when the first white settlers entered this territory. The Sakrivier may vary in breadth from a few yards to ten miles.

Sak means, in this sense, "to sink into the ground". The Sakrivier has that tendency; the water soaks in as the river flows down the valley. At one place, near Onderste Doorns, there is a *vloer*, a dead level surface like a ballroom, where the river becomes a vlel covering more than two hundred square miles. It is only in the flood season from December to April that the rivers spread out in this way, forming huge sheets of water a few inches deep. They bring with them millions of tons of fine silt from the plateaux, immensely fertile, so that the *saaidam* farmer never has to buy a bag of fertilizer.

The *saaidam* is simply a low embankment thrown across a flat valley or plain to delay the flow of flood water and ensure sufficient moisture in the soil for the germination of a crop. One good flood is enough; no further rain is needed. Almost every farm in the Sakrivier valley has the right

levels for this sort of irrigation, and soil which will yield marvellous crops if it is well soaked.

No matter how long the droughts may last, there are always fish in the pools and dams and mud of these rivers. When a pool is pumped dry, sacks of fish are taken; fish called *sandvis*, weighing up to nine pounds. On many a Sunday the *volgies* are to be seen along the banks fishing with dough or worms on their hooks.

Mr. W.B. Gordon, director of irrigation in the Cape early this century, appears to have been the "discoverer" of the Sakrivier *saaidam* farmers. He wrote an official report in 1904 in which he declared that on arrival at the Cape he had been assured that the flood water irrigation system did not exist anywhere in the country. Yet he found many successful *saaidam* farmers during his tour of North West Cape. The farmers, he said, were intelligent and experienced, and only needed a railway to send their produce to market. Gordon recommended further surveys, as he thought there were hundreds of thousands of acres suitable for *saaidam* irrigation. He was one of the visionaries.

The first white settler on the Sakrivier was a missionary, the Rev. Johannes Kircherer, from Holland. He reached Cape Town in 1799 and there met Floris Visser, a pious border farmer. Visser persuaded Kircherer to open the Sakrivier mission and gave all the practical help that was necessary. He raised a public subscription, bought sheep and cattle, and gathered many outcast Bushmen and Hottentots on the mission site. The station was called Blydevooruitzig or "Happy Prospect", thirty miles north-east of the present Fraserburg village.

One of the Krugers of the Roggeveld escorted Kircherer to the spot. A small church was built, with a stone pulpit; and a parchment stretched over a gap in the wall served as a window. Kircherer was one of the first white men to make a sympathetic study of the Bushmen. He found it difficult to preach to them, however, as there was no efficient interpreter.

Kircherer was a restless spirit. In 1803 he decided to visit England and raise money for the mission. He took with him three Hottentots

who made a great impression on London congregations. When Kircherer returned to South Africa, however, he left the London Mission Society, which had been supporting him, and became a Dutch Reformed Church minister at Graaff-Reinet.

Meanwhile a farmer named Christian Botma had remained in charge of the Sakrivier mission. Botma was an enthusiast, a man who was prepared to make great sacrifices for the cause. Lichtenstein, who visited the mission, described him as "a quiet orderly personage, not a man of many words." However, the mission had not prospered. Botma had grown wheat and vegetables - the first Sakrivier wheat crop - but the cattle kraals were in ruins and wild Bushmen had carried off the station's flocks. Lichtenstein summed up: "The missionaries seemed wholly to forget that mankind were destined to work as well as to pray. Such an institution bore in itself the germs of its own downfall. Such was the universal sloth and negligence that no one could remain here

but with great reluctance and from strong necessity."

So the mission failed and the lonely gorge of the "Happy Prospect" was abandoned. In the seventies of last century, however, wheat was grown again in the Sakrivier valley. This time it was due to the enterprise of a Mr. Jacobus Nel van der Merwe, who started work at Tontelboskolk and built the pioneer saaidam system there. He taught his sons the difficult art of floodwater irrigation, with oogmaat (eye-measurement) as the guiding principle. The old man lived to see ten thousand acres at Tontelboskolk under irrigation.

One of his sons, also "Koos Nel", became owner of the farm Twee Riviere at the junction of the Sak and Fish rivers, about one hundred and twenty miles from Carnarvon. "Koos Nel" built a larger and more elaborate saaidam system on this strategic farm than even his father had attempted. Early this century "Koos Nel" sold a portion of Twee Riviere to Mr.

Andrew Bain, magistrate of Calvinia and son of the Bain who built Bain's Kloof.

Andrew Bain gave the farm to his son Donald, and Donald Rain told me of his struggle to make saaidam farming pay. He had mules, scrapers and ploughs in 1906, but the sunbaked soil yielded reluctantly. Bain could see the possibilities. He looked out over huge areas which could be irrigated by the flood waters. But he knew that the enterprise called for capital.

Twee Riviere is one of the lonely farms of the vast district, yet Cape Town business men heard of the marvellous wheat crops - marvellous when the rivers flowed - and came to see the scheme for themselves. In 1909 Donald Bain sold out to a company called Zak River Estates, and became general manager of the ambitious undertaking. He was then twenty years of age, and married. Before long the company had bought farm after farm along the river, and Bain was responsible for a total area

of more than one hundred thousand morgen. The great gamble had started.

For a quarter of a century that company fought hard to produce wheat on a scale South Africa had never seen before. In the early days before World War I the directors would rail their motor-car to Carnarvon, and then set out adventurously across country, with two chauffeurs to deal with the breakdowns. Sometimes the journey to Twee Riviere (three hours run from Carnarvon today) lasted eighteen hours. But they had faith in their car and in the wheat project which was costing thousands and which later cost many more thousands of pounds.

About one-quarter of the company's land was capable of irrigation, along a river frontage of eighty-four miles. Bain built a control dam with sluice-gates near the Twee Riviere homestead and five dams of various sizes for sowing wheat and lucerne. Whole families were engaged, more than a hundred men, women and children, to work the saaidam

system at Twee Riviere alone. And as early as 1911 it looked as though the most glowing forecasts would be justified. Flood water and weather were favourable that year. Bain reaped more than sixteen thousand bags of wheat, a yield of four point four bags to the acre, and of thirty-five fold of seed used. But the following year there was no crop. By 1914 the company had increased its holdings, and nearly ten thousand acres were seeded. This was a magnificent effort, yet the crop did not reach ten thousand bags. One expert after another was called in to solve the mystery, but it remains a mystery to this day.

Donald Bain studied every soil manual he could find and gave much thought to the problem of *brak*, the harmful salts brought to the surface by irrigation. California also has a brak problem, and, among the experts who visited the Sakrivier farms were men with Californian experience. The company wrote to Cairo for guidance in saaidam problems.

Everything possible was done to run the huge estates on scientific lines.

Mr. A.F. Stephen, a director who first visited the scheme in 1912, told me that *brak* was not the main hazard. When the flood waters arrived the wheat grew; and there were years when he saw mile after mile of water spread out over the land.

"Some years were encouraging," recalled Mr. Stephen. "I remember a record crop of forty thousand sacks of wheat. With such results, it seemed foolish to abandon the scheme. There were years when I saw what might have been a hundred thousand sacks of wheat in the fields; and soon afterwards I would drive up there again and find most of the wheat as dead as mutton. I could hardly believe my eyes. Rust, the fatal wheat disease, which was supposed to be unknown in the North West Cape, had done its work."

Life blood of the Sakrivier farms is flood water at the right time. Frost and intense heat,

locusts, green fly and crickets all levied toll on the estates; and expert advice sometimes proved costly. But in the final analysis, the entire project depended on seasonable flood water, and failed because too often the flood water did not arrive. Those who have watched the flooding along the Sakrivier never forget this dramatic spectacle. One day you see *saaidam* after cracked *saaidam* baking under the sun. But everyone is alert, for the warning has arrived, great masses of turbid water are known to be on the way. Every man on the many farms patrols the miles of dam walls; one hundred and sixty miles of walls are guarded day and night so that weak points may be strengthened and "breaks" prevented. They are always looking for the tell-tale gaps called *haasbekke* and the holes made by moles and rats.

Sometimes you can hear the rushing waters when the oncoming wave is still ten miles away. Then the flood crashes against the first dam, the massive embankment blocking the

river. You can feel the shock as the wave recedes and returns to mount against the dam. If the dam holds, the waters run out on both sides along the *sloepe* which distribute the water to many farms.

This is the time when the sluice gates are opened and each *saaidam* is filled in turn. The cracked earth has become a shallow lake. Sometimes a gale of wind sweeps waves across the dams, and then signal lamps wink in the darkness and men hasten to points that are threatened.

Weeks pass, the water soaks in thoroughly and is run off as seeding time approaches. The soil is ploughed and sown, but sparingly, so that growth will not be retarded by the density of the grain. Sometimes it is possible to reap several crops without reploughing or re-sowing. Sometimes the Sakrivier is a farmer's paradise.

Did an unfavourable weather cycle prevail during the period of the company's effort?

Figures for this remote area do not go back very far. Donald Bain, in 1923, reported: "I have examined the meteorological records for the past forty years and find that we have gone through only what we can expect to experience in the future."

Two years later Bain gave up the struggle and left to earn a living as a desert guide and hunter in Bechuanaland and South West Africa.⁶ Another decade passed, and the company decided to abandon the great experiment; but it was not until 1944 that they sold their farms along the Sakrivier. During thirty-five years there the company had not only grown the basic

⁶ His successor was the late Mr. E.F. Bacon, a civil engineer as well as an experienced farmer. He was a Buddhist by religion. Mr. Bacon controlled the *brak* successfully and under his energetic management the succession of serious losses was checked; but the dreams of great wheat crops were never realized

wheat crop, but had also tried oats, barley, maize and other cereals, lucerne and fodder grasses. They had planted orchards of apples and pears and stocked their farms with sheep, cattle and horses. They had also operated a network of trading stores.

"The life story of the estates is one of fine promise, great hopes and high endeavour, persistently dogged by ill fortune; of increasing struggles with the vagaries of a climate, often ill-tempered, but carrying rich gifts in its hands in its kindlier moments," declared one of the directors at the annual meeting of shareholders when it was decided to wind up the enterprise. "Nature, however, has not shown, so far, many soft moments for the estates, and it is a matter for sad reflection that such an outstandingly fine human effort has had to face defeat at the hands of forces which lie beyond mortal control. "

Today the line of river farms worked for years by companies are again owned by individual farmers. There is another Koos Nel van der Merwe on the farm which his great-grandfather

started. In good years, when the flood waters sweep past Twee Riviere, the wheat grows as it has always done, mile after mile of wheat flaming across the Karoo landscape. Yet it seems that lucerne may prove to be a more profitable crop, and many thousands of bales are reaped nowadays. Lupins are planted, too, to feed the sheep.

Forget the dry years. It is a landscape with a peculiar magic for some people. I am thinking especially of Donald Bain, man of many adventures, who suffered so many setbacks there during his youth. Shortly after World War II, and not long before his death, I met him in a city street, and asked: "What next? "

"I'm going full circle - back to Sakrivier, back to my first job," Bain replied, smiling. He had been roaming the lonely corners of Southern Africa for a long time, but there was peace of mind in his voice and I could see he was looking forward to settling down in the homestead at Twee Riviere which held so many memories for him. In spite of all that had happened, Donald Bain

remained one of the Sakrivier visionaries to the end of his days.

CHAPTER 20

HOME OF STRANGE TALES

NAMAQUALAND was my favourite run during the years when I could sit all night at the wheel of a fast car without feeling the strain. Nowadays, whenever I pass into that vast and varied district of granite and sand, aloe and kokerboom, I renew my youth. Namaqualand is the home of strange tales.

Thanks to the flowers, Namaqualand is no longer the unknown corner of the Cape Province. I knew it before the run to Springbok became a fashionable week-end trip in the spring flower season. I met the Namaqualanders before they were accustomed to seeing strangers every day. And I admired them for their intense love of a part of South Africa which fills some people with dread. Your true Namaqualander regards himself as an exile if he has to earn a living elsewhere. He will make great sacrifices to work

within the borders of Namaqualand. He speaks his own Afrikaans dialect; and at one time he regarded himself almost as a member of a separate race.

There is work for all in Namaqualand today, but it was often a land of famine not so many years ago. William Charles Scully, poet and Namaqualand magistrate, once remarked that if a white man were to be left naked in parts of the country on a hot day he would be roasted to death as effectively as if he were a heretic and in the power of Torquemada. "Yet those flaming, quivering, barren tracts are ready, at the bidding of the first soaking rain cloud, to spring to life in tender verdure and wealth of dazzling, glowing petals," wrote the poet. "It is like the everlasting springing of hope in man's tortured but indomitable spirit."

So to appreciate the miracle of the spring flowers in Namaqualand you should have a memory of that burnt-out land in the merciless summer heat or the agonizing winter days when the west wind cuts through a leather jacket. It can be a land of

shade less trees and mirage where the scorched veld burns up through the soles of your shoes. So cold are some winter nights that it is wise to drain the radiators of cars standing in the open. Rain comes only after years of ordeal. Rain brings not only the flowers but new life to all Namaqualand; and nowhere else in South Africa are the contrasts so sharp.

When spring throws her colours lavishly over Namaqualand you gaze upon a botanist's dream of paradise. Every year the people hope that the baked wastes will become a vast Persian carpet of scarlet, mauve and gold. You cannot rely on it. Memorable flower seasons may follow one another; or there may be a long interval of years.

I know an hotel-keeper at Springbok ("capital" of Namaqualand) who has been there for thirty-five years, and who has noted only five superb wild flower seasons. This hotelkeeper had a set of colour photographs taken during the phenomenal spring of 1939 and sent them to his brother in New York. They were printed as

postcards, and a more dazzling series would be hard to imagine. Again in 1940 and 1941 there were good displays. More than a thousand visitors passed through one hotel in Namaqualand during August and September 1941. Since then, 1950 satisfied the tourists and 1954 was a really brilliant year.

It is worth driving up the long "Diamond Road" from Cape Town to Namaqualand when the flowers are out. But make sure they are out. Seldom is there anything to see until early in September. And make sure you have somewhere to sleep. Someone called on me the other day to ask what sort of equipment he should take on a Namaqualand expedition. I told him that all he needed was a full-sized car. The days when travellers perished of thirst in this wilderness are over. There is a bar about every forty miles along the route to Springbok, and a garage. Baby cars have to be nursed off the track in Namaqualand, and even on some stretches of the main road. But the country is no

longer hazardous except, perhaps, in the most remote corners near the Orange River.

Many people are vague about Namaqualand geography. Citrusdal and Clanwilliam usually provide moderate spring wild flower displays, but they are not (as some imagine) in Namaqualand. You cross the border into Namaqualand at the Doorn River bridge near Klaver; and the flower country is much farther north. Still, it is only a day's run, less than four hundred miles, from Cape Town to Springbok.

Garies in the Kamiesberg is about the southern limit of the flowers that transform mountainside and veld into a botanical wonderland. Leliefontein, the old mission of the Rev. Barnabas Shaw, stands in a wild flower reserve. These are the high sierras of Namaqualand, and at Leliefontein you are up five thousand feet. You may find snow on the mountains and the flowers growing in such glory that it is like sunset on the ground. Here are proteas and heath, and the lilies that gave the old mission its name.

Namaqualand most famous flower is the large, brilliant orange and black gousblom, a daisy larger and more gorgeous than any daisy you have seen in your life. Sheets of gousblom, mile after mile of gousblom are found on the valley floors or open flats during a good season. Smaller varieties of gousblom are seen in many colours. The arctotis, for example, is a more delicate flower. Some have silvery pink petals. Every shade from white to deep orange may be observed.

On rocky hills or mountainsides are the mesembryanthemums that most of us call vygies or sour figs. They, too, blossom in a wide range of colours - scarlet, blue, purple, pink or flaming yellow. Vygies seem to give the signal that spring has come to Namaqualand, for when they cover the veld in September the desert kaleidoscope mounts in grandeur day after day.

As you drive northwards through the mountains to Springbok you may see that weird tree aloë, the kokerboom, growing

beside the road. This was the tree from which the Bushmen made their quivers. Springbok is the centre for side-trips eastwards into Bushmanland, north to Klipfontein, to Steinkopf, to the copper mines, to missions, all transformed by the tapestry of flowers.

Nearly always the finest flowers are off the main roads. Spektakel, the old copper mine twenty miles west of Springbok, has often been clothed in flowers. Dry little Steinkopf has a mission garden with a great collection of succulent plants; stapelias, euphorbias, plants that mimic stones and tortoises and pincushions; plants that famous botanists have travelled across the globe to examine in the land of their origin.

They have pulled up the narrow-gauge railway that enthralled me when I first went to Namaqualand, and the station at Klipfontein (where the toy train stopped for lunch) is in ruins. But the enormous gum-trees are still there; and perhaps there are nights when ghostly copper trains with Cornish drivers still

make the run to Port Nolloth. Klipfontein is the finest spot in all Namaqualand for spring flowers. During the season of 1934 I met a famous Canadian botanist there who had come all that way to collect seeds and succulents. That year he was lucky. There, too, I watched Hugo Naude painting some of his finest landscapes. He found inspiration in the Namaqualand spring. Years ago the Cape Copper Company ran a free train to Klipfontein whenever the flowers came out. That was a picnic their employees never forgot.

When you push into the lonely country between O'Okiep and the Orange river there is a ghastly sea of sand called the Koa Valley - a nightmare stretch where many a car was abandoned in the old days. Seldom does the Koa Valley share in the spring resurrection. But in 1939 this howling desolation was covered so thickly with a solid mass of flowers that for stretches of five miles you could hardly stick a pin between them. That was typical of

the unpredictable Namaqualand springtime. The flower seasons are so temperamental and so patchy that you can only seek local advice and drive forth hopefully.

Spring is a sudden event in Namaqualand, and it may be cut off like the snapping of a technicolour film. During the early August flower season of 1935, for example, a sandstorm came roaring over the countryside with the east wind. Curving sheets of flowers that were like rainbows one day withered the next. A perfect spring, however, finds most of the Union's leading botanists revelling in Namaqualand's plant life and seeking the rare succulents while they are in flower. While they last, these flowers form South Africa's most magnificent spectacle.

Namaqualanders love these contrasts. They love all changes of scene provided they occur within their own borders. Their ancestors were trekboers and transport-riders, the trek spirit

still dominates Namaqualand, and most farmers still pack up their mat houses and trek to the veld where rain has fallen.

This is still the land of candles and sheepskin rugs; a land where only the rich have kitchens and all the rest cook in iron pots within a *vuurskerm* of bushes, this is the land of such pioneer families, as the Steenkamps and Mosterts, the Engelbrechts and Dreyers, the Coetzees and Esterhuizens. Some of them have owned the same farms for five or six generations.

My favourite map of Namaqualand is a canvas-backed folder more than fifty years old. It is a large-scale map, showing the seventeen-thousand square miles of the Union's largest district; revealing the salt pans and sandflats of the coast and the great Kamiesberg range splitting the country from north to south. Here are such contrasts as the icy Antarctic currents that sweep the coast, and Goodhouse farm in the Orange River valley - a place of precious memories for me because of Carl Weidner's

hospitality, but still the hottest place in South Africa.

My old map brings out the drama and narrative value of the Namaqualand place-names. Besondermeid or Klein Besondermeid ("remarkable little girl") near Steinkopf is supposed to perpetuate the memory of a young girl who loaded her father's guns and helped to rout a horde of Hottentot raiders. But if you inquire more deeply, you discover a hill in the vicinity bearing the ancient Hottentot name of Kara Khois (Kara - to differ; Khois – a woman). The Hottentots fancied they saw in this odd-looking hill a peculiar woman, and there is the real origin of the legend. The Namaqua tribe, of Hottentots who gave their name to the country migrated northwards into South West Africa fairly early last century. They left Hottentot names all the way from the Gariep ("river of the wilderness", Orange River) south to Garies. Origins of Hottentot and Bushman names, however, are often controversial. It takes a linguist to spell and pronounce the clicks. So these names either

became corrupted or, if they were difficult they disappeared.

Garies, a typical Namaqualand village, is an example of an original Hottentot name which has remained. Garies is a species of grass from which the Hottentots made beds; though the name may have been chosen because of the gardens in the river bed; while a third explanation is that the word means "full of milk". The village was unofficially re-named Genisdal in honour of a school teacher of a century ago. For some reason the Namaqualanders preferred Garies.

I came across other survivals. Garoo, the Hottentots called a spot where they encountered a growling leopard. Kouroo was the place where they heard the rumbling of thunder; and Choachamma, the chattering of the baboon. Dr. P.W. Laidler, while district surgeon, came across a water-hole known to the Hottentots as Tkomtis, the "Sorry Spring". He traced this back to a tragedy when an old man, lying down to quench his thirst, overbalanced owing to the *velsak* on his back and fell into the pool. His aged wife was unable to haul

him out and so he was drowned. In the valley north of Anenous there is a koppie which might be spelt Dheera Dau if you left out the clicks. That means "baboon blood". An old Hottentot clan made war on the baboons, drove them into the koppie and wiped them out.

In the Richtersveld there is a long black mountain known as Daie Loas, "dead fire", because the Bushmen hiding there put out their fires on the approach of the Hottentots. Many place-names in Namaqualand refer to fights between the Hottentots and Bushmen.

Ukribip is a reminder that once there were elephants in Namaqualand. Many rocks show highly-polished corners where the great beasts rubbed their itching skins. Ukribip means "scratching place". O'Okiep appears to be a corruption of the Hottentot U-Geib, meaning a great supply of brackish water. Namies, Nigramoep, Anenous and Brabies are not so easy. Goodhouse is really another Hottentot name - Gu-daos, the sheep ford. Kamma is the Hottentot word for water, and this forms part of many

Namaqualand names. Down in the south there is a river where Hottentot tribes once fought a battle, giving their war cry of "toro - toro" (war! war!). The river is still called the Troe-Troe.

The early Portuguese navigators left one name at least on the Namaqualand coast - Cape Voltas, south of the Orange River mouth. Simon van der Stel and his men were the next explorers from Europe to mark the Namaqualand map. They called the scene of their copper prospecting Koperberg, and the governor inscribed his initials on a rock. Some authorities credited Van der Stel with naming Spektakel, twenty miles west of Springbok. You can see the ocean from there in clear weather, and Simon is supposed to have cried in delight: "Wat een spektakel!" However, it is doubtful whether the expedition passed that way at all. Spektakel is probably no older than 1809, when Landdrost van der Graaff, brother of the governor, admired the view.

Buffels River, which flows (at long intervals) past Spektakel, was undoubtedly named by Van der Stel's party. Bushmen informed them that they had seen buffalo grazing on the river bank. Grootmist, near the river mouth, describes accurately enough the fogs that hang over this coastline for days on end. Farther inland you come to Nababeep, a copper mine revived in recent years by American enterprise. Nababeep is the Hottentot word for giraffe. A new "suburb" of Nababeep, built by the company for the mine workers, is known as "White City", the only American place-name in Namaqualand.

Wherever you go there are reminders of vanished animals. Hartbeesrivier, Leeuklip, Elandsklip, Wildepaardehoek, Rhebokfontein and Blesbokkrans are farm names that speak for themselves. I do not suppose the gemsbok has been seen at Gemsbokvlei for many years; but Wolfberg and Wolwepoort may still give shelter to hyenas.

Namaqualand farm names are sometimes extremely imaginative - 's Morgenshadu, for example, has a touch of poetry. Some are puzzling. Who was the Pedro of Pedroskloof in the Kamiesberg? How did Meidjieskaroo gain its name? Dansekraal is obvious enough, but what about Couragiefontein, Manelsvlei, Juliesvlei and Pollyskloof ? In a land which can be dangerously thirsty it is not surprising to encounter farms named Dooddrink, Bitterfontein, Cutwater and Bitterputs; and it is a relief indeed to reach Lekkerdrink at last.

Soebatsfontein has a grim story. Hendrik Stievert, an exsoldier of the Dutch East India Company, fell into the hands of Bushmen there in 1798. He implored them to spare his life (hence Soebatsfontein) but they showed no mercy.

Mesklip, in the Springbok area, is a shady place under rocks where many travellers have rested. According to legend, a Bushman sleeping there had a nightmare and thought someone was attacking him. Still half asleep, he took up his

bow and arrow and shot himself in the foot. His companion laughed so much that he had to wipe away the tears. Unfortunately the companion forgot that he was holding a knife, and injured his eye. The knife was then usefully employed in removing the arrow from the other's foot. Mesklip still tells the tale.

Cornish miners arrived in Namaqualand a century ago, but I can recall only one Cornish name off hand. That is Dick's Cutting, on the abandoned narrow gauge railway line between Port Nolloth and O'Okiep.

Bowesdorp, an almost deserted village, started out in life as Wilgenhouts kloof. When the first Dutch Reformed Church in Namaqualand was built there in 1864 it was renamed Bowe's Ville, after the popular Dr. Henry Bowe, the district surgeon almost a century ago. (Dr. Bowe took part in the ceremony and broke a bottle of whisky on a rock). Bowe's Ville gave way to Bowesdorp. There was not much water in the narrow kloof, however, and the ministers disliked the place. In 1924 the inhabitants (with

one stubborn exception) broke up their homes and the church and rebuilt the village at Kamieskroon a few miles away. Shops, police and post office followed. But there is a charm about the kloof that windy Kamiesdorp does not possess, and I have always admired the dogged character who stayed behind at Bowesdorp. Dr. Bowe, I may add, had a son Allan who opened a jeweller's shop in Moscow and designed some of the famous Easter eggs, encrusted with jewels, for the Tsars.

Namaqualand's first road was the old transport road between Hondeklip Bay and the copper mines. It was known as the Messelpad (masonry road) because of the amount of difficult building which had to be done in the mountains. Often there were six hundred convicts at work, under a French engineer. His initials, F.C., are still to be seen carved on a rock at the roadside. Having completed this simple memorial he shot himself, the reason being that he had a coloured mistress and children, and his wife had arrived from

France to visit him. Namaqualand certainly has its share of old tragedies.

Hondeklip Bay, of course, is no mystery at all. The famous "dog stone" stands on a rise above the fishing village; a large boulder which resembled a sitting dog until a lightning flash struck off the head many years ago. In the early days of the settlement wild dogs prowled round the "dog stone" and destroyed sheep. Hondeklip Bay certainly has an appropriate name.

In the harbour at Hondeklip Bay is a reef marked on the chart as Yankee John. According to legend, Yankee John was the name of a pirate ship which put into this dangerous anchorage. While the captain and mate were on shore - burying a treasure in the dunes, of course - the ship dragged her anchor, broke up on the reef and vanished. "Yankee John. I'm coming!" shouted the demented captain, and raced into the surf and was drowned. This occurred long before any settlement had been built round the little bay.

Only the mate remained to carry the tale of disaster to Cape Town.

Mountains in Namaqualand have memorable names. What could be more fitting than Weeskind (orphan) for a solitary granite peak in the Kamiesberg? Sneekop and Kouberg emphasize the bitter winter climate. A mile from Kamieskroon stands the "Kroon" itself, an 1,100 foot peak crowned with a huge cleft rock. Locally it is regarded as a fearsome climb, but a party of skilled mountaineers reached the summit within an hour of leaving the village.

Kamiesberg, the main range of Namaqualand, is a corrupted Hottentot name of dubious meaning. It may have been the "lion mountain", though there is a similar Hottentot word referring to "gathering strayed cattle". Flaminkberg, Eselskop, Kokerbooms Hoogte and Tamboersberg are vivid enough. But I wish someone would tell me how Jaloersberg, to the south of Garies, gained its name. A jealous mountain must surely have its legends.

Engelsepunt is a sinister mountain in the Van Rhynsdorp district. A murderer, who was an Englishman, was pursued by the veldkornet and a commando to the mountain heights. There, when he refused to surrender, he was shot dead.

Most tragic of all Namaqualand place-names is Kinderlê near Steinkopf. More than a century ago a smous arrived at Besondermeid from the Cape with two wagons. The Hottentot parents hurried away from their settlement to see what the smous had to offer. While they were away the Bushmen killed the old people and all the children except two who were wounded and feigned death. Kinderlê, where the children were laid to rest in one huge grave, now has a gravestone bearing the inscription: "Grave of thirty-two Namaqua children murdered by Bushmen."

Out on the edge of Bushmanland is a spot marked Moedverloren. I can understand anyone losing his courage in such a place, after one of the long droughts, perhaps, or on a trek

when one water hole after another was dry. Yet there have always been people who have found happiness in the wide, arid spaces of Namaqualand. In a far corner you will find a farm named Weltevreden.

If you had asked me, twenty years ago, to name the queerest character in Namaqualand I would have selected "Ryk Jasper" Cloete. Coloured people seldom manage to hang on to their money. Rich jasper was an open-handed man, yet he always had Kruger sovereigns to spend.

It was in Solomon Rabinowitz's store at Steinkopf that I met jasper and his retinue. Jasper was an old man then, well over seventy; fat but dignified, quiet and intelligent. The white blood had almost died out in him. He was a Hottentot patriarch. Rabinowitz whispered : "They call me King Solomon of the Richtersveld, but there stands the real Richtersveld ruler."

I have traced Jasper's ancestry for more than a century and a half, to a white farmer Cloete, one

of the earliest Kamiesberg settlers. This pioneer had a white wife and three young sons. When his wife died on that lonely farm he took a Hottentot mistress.

Thus the first Jasper Cloete was born. When the father died, Jasper was a married man with seven sons, owner of cattle and small stock his father had given him. His three white half-brothers forced him to leave the Kamiesberg farm, and Jasper trekked away to the north-west in search of grazing.

He came to the oasis in a kloof called Komaggas ("brown cattle waters") in the Komaggas mountains near the coast, and persuaded the Hottentots he found there to sell him the place. There was some trouble when the distant Hottentot *kaptein* heard of the transaction. Jasper's wife belonged to the clan, however, and she arranged everything in her husband's favour.

Jasper pleaded with the missionary Schmelen to settle at Komaggas. The missionary did so in 1829; and through his influence a surveyor was

sent to Komaggas and a reserve of nearly seventy thousand morgen was set aside there for the Bastards and Hottentots.

In this way Jasper Cloete and his family became prosperous. He encouraged hard-working liberated slaves from the Cape to join the community; and their descendants, Fortuins, Damons, Beukes, Adonis, are still there. Most of the Komaggas people were wretchedly poor, but the Cloetes had stock and the most fertile land, and they flourished.

Jasper Cloete the second remained at Komaggas, but his son Jasper - the legendary "Ryk Jasper" - moved away into the Richtersveld towards the end of last century. This wild corner, named after an old missionary, is the hot country in the last great loop of the Orange River before it reaches the sea. It is the home of the last pure Hottentots south of the river, the very last primitive, Nama-speaking people in the Union. They are still there, living on the milk of their tiny herds of cows and goats. In the old days some of them contrived to grow a little wheat

on the granite mountain-tops where rain sometimes fell. Such brave efforts are too strenuous for the present generation. They dig out the edible roots like the Bushmen of old, and collect gum from the thorn trees along the river.

Kuboos is the "capital" of the Richtersveld Hottentots, just a stone church and mission house and a few mat-huts which these nomads carry round with them when they trek in search of grazing. When the magistrate Scully paid an official visit to Kuboos in the eighteen-nineties he found the coloured missionary Hein presiding over a Hottentot "Raad" of which Jasper Cloete was a member.

A member of the congregation had been flogged for adultery. It was an illegal punishment, but Scully felt that the culprit had deserved the lashes and ignored his complaint. Scully was then entertained by the missionary to a Richtersveld banquet of coffee, rye-bread and wild honey.

Later, near the Orange River mouth, Scully met "Ryk Jasper" again. Jasper had an ancient wagon, a mat-house and a number of goats; and Scully noted that he wore good clothes and had an air of prosperity. These two men, both remarkable in their own ways, went off springbok hunting together.

As the years passed Jasper Cloete's influence in the remote Richtersveld became supreme. White men, apart from occasional prospectors, were seldom seen there. Sometimes the Namaqualand farmers sent cattle and sheep to graze in the Richtersveld, however, and "Ryk Jasper" collected the grazing fees. In a land without white officials, Jasper was the government.

Jasper moved to Lekkersing, another weird little settlement in the Richtersveld hills, some years before his death. The only stone buildings at Lekkersing are the church and the teacher's cottage. Jasper built himself a huge mat-house, with a framework of *hakiesdoring wood* from the river covered with long, plaited

rush mats. It is nothing unusual in Namaqualand for a rich man to live in a *matjieshuisie*; many a wealthy white sheep farmer prefers this type of dwelling to the most solid farmhouse.

Some say that Lekkersing gained its name when the acoustics among the rocks flattered Jasper's deep voice. I think it was named before Jasper's day, because of the echo. Lekkersing has a splendid, pure spring, in pleasant contrast with other Richtersveld drinking places. It is a long way from Lekkersing to the nearest store, however, and when I met "Ryk Jasper" in Steinkopf he seemed to be stocking his wagons for a siege.

He had barrels of wine on board, and I watched him buying cases of canned food, sacks of rice and potatoes, rolls of cloth, boxes of soap. Rabinowitz offered Jasper a cigarette, and Jasper performed the feat which astounded everyone who watched it. He lit the cigarette, inhaled deeply - and half the cigarette had gone. When

one more mighty puff of smoke had come out of Jasper's mouth, the cigarette was finished.

At one time, Rabinowitz told me, "Ryk Jasper" had always paid for his purchases in golden sovereigns. According to several visitors, he had a chest of Kruger gold in his mat-hut at Lekkersing. When the Union left the gold standard, however, Jasper soon realized the difference in value between a sovereign and a pound note; and he paid his debts in paper. Besides this gold, "Ryk Jasper" owned large herds of sheep and goats, cattle and horses.

Jasper Cloete died at Lekkersing in 1942 at the age of eighty. From all parts of the Richtersveld flocked the Hottentots to gather round the grave of "Vader Jasper". It was mysterious. They had known the old man was ill, but the news of his death must have reached the far corners by some means known only to primitive people.

Today there is still a Jasper Cloete in the Richtersveld, but he is an adopted son. "Ryk Jasper" and his wife Maria had no children of

their own. Inevitably there is a legend that "Ryk Jasper" never revealed the hiding-place of the whole of his hoarded gold. There may be some truth in that tale. "Ryk Jasper" was indeed a rich man.

If there is anyone with older memories of Namaqualand than Miss Henrietta von Schlicht I would like to meet that veteran. Miss von Schlicht will soon be a centenarian.

Her father, Albert von Schlicht, was a chemist and mineralogist who landed in Cape Town from Berlin in 1840 and looked round for adventure. He went to Namaqualand as a prospector and discovered the famous mine which he named Concordia. During one of his visits to Cape Town, the young and prosperous mine owner met a Miss Langschmidt. She was a sister of the German artist whose paintings of the Cape are now extremely valuable. They were married, and Albert von Schlicht built a fine stone mansion which still stands at Concordia.

Concordia was very much in the wilderness in those days, but the Von Schlichts lived well. Eight children were born there; the boys had German tutors and English governesses taught the girls. Miss Henrietta von Schlicht is the only survivor.

"I can remember my mother describing the day of her arrival in Cape Town - December 1, 1834, the day the slaves were freed," Miss von Schlicht told me. "She often recalled the thanksgiving services in the churches and the scenes of rejoicing in the streets."

There were hostile Bushmen in the desert round Concordia in the middle of last century. Henrietta spoke sadly of her father's carpenter, young Carl Schroder, who set out to visit his parents at Fella mission and was killed by poisoned arrows at a water-hole.

The Hottentots were friendly. Albert von Schlicht had a large stock of genuine eau-de-cologne in wicker-covered bottles; and for each bottle the Hottentots gave him one sheep. Eau-

de-cologne became the favourite drink of the Hottentots. The Von Schlichts were never short of meat, but they had to make their own vegetable garden.

Apart from his work on the mine, Albert von Schlicht acquired a great reputation as a medical adviser. He was always known as Doctor von Schlicht, and trekboers and miners travelled long distances to consult him.

Every year the whole Von Schlicht family trekked from Concordia to Somerset West for a month's holiday. It took twelve days each way in horse wagons. Henrietta remembers the nights spent at farms during those journeys, the sweet-flavoured farm bread, the stewed mutton, and the burning summer heat on the road. They also spent short seaside holidays at Port Nolloth, four days by ox-wagon from Concordia before railway construction started in 1869. Port Nolloth consisted of one shop and one house. Wreckage from lost ships littered the beach, and there was no jetty. During his years at Concordia, Von Schlicht brought out Cornish

miners and built most of the present village. He had left Germany because he had a weak chest - and also to avoid military service. "He loved the life at Concordia, all of us loved it," declared Miss von Schlicht. "I remember the summer thunderstorms ... the heat was terrific, but none of us minded it. I have been sitting in the sun all morning. I have often wanted to return to Concordia, but no one would know me now."

Miss von Schlicht has vivid memories of the springbok that were shot in the streets of Concordia and turned into biltong. She saw the springbok migrating in millions across Namaqualand.

There came a slump in copper. Von Schlicht was ruined; but the Cape Copper Company made him manager of the rich Spektakel mine not far away, and the whole family moved into a new home. "I was fond of riding in those days," recalled Miss von Schlicht. "Often I would leave Spektakel at four in the morning, reach Springbok at breakfast time, and go to a dance that night. Lancers, polkas, quadrilles; the

young people nowadays say those dances are dull, but we danced all night and rode back to Spektakel in the morning. "

James Benjamin Bassingthwaighte, a young hunter and trader from Damaraland, settled at Spektakel for a time in the early eighteenthies and fell in love with Henrietta's sister Philipina. When he returned to the lawless country north of the Orange River he took Philipina with him as his bride. The Bassingthwaights⁷ made history north of the border.

Another copper slump resulted in the closing down of the Spektakel mine. The smelting plant had been opened some time before the slump, and named after Henrietta von Schlicht. But now the family had to move again. They settled in Springbok, where Albert von Schlicht died a poor man.

⁷ See "Lords of the Last Frontier" by Lawrence G. Green (Timmins).

Mrs. von Schlicht was placed in charge of the Cape Copper Company's rest-house on the railway line at Klipfontein, between O'Okiep and Port Nolloth. This was the half-way house I mentioned earlier, where the trains stopped so that passengers could have lunch. The first trains were drawn by mules; then steam locomotives arrived and journeys became easier. Klipfontein is a remote spot, but the Von Schlichts always had company. Often a whole Cornish cricket team spent the night at the rest-house. Famous botanists, Bolus and Marloth, stayed there on collecting expeditions; and Dr. Peringuey of the South African Museum made it his base while hunting lizards. Miss von Schlicht still shudders when she thinks of some of the specimens he brought in.

Violent dust storms sometimes upset the timetable of the miniature railway. There is a cutting at Anenous below Klipfontein; and when these storms swept down on the line the cutting would be filled with sand. Once a train

stuck in the cutting for hours until the plate-layers could dig it out. The passengers had lunch at five o'clock that afternoon at Mrs. von Schmitt's rest-house.

As a child Miss von Schlicht learnt a little of the Hottentot language, and she can still count up to ten, with the authentic clicks. "I never learnt anything that was too much trouble," she says. "Perhaps that is one reason why I have lived so long. Sometimes I feel like a hundred, though I have no ambition to live to be a hundred. But I would like to see the desert again after the rains, with high grass everywhere. Those were wonderful years when I went riding out in the wilderness."

Namaqualand is the land of strange tales. Did you ever hear of the dates of Henkries? This is a moist patch of two hundred morgen in the Steinkopf reserve. During the First World War a commando halted there to water the horses before pushing on to the Orange River.

Two men of the commando, Van der Westhuizen and Van Heerden, opened a packet of dates they had bought at Steinkopf, and left the stones on the ground. Two date palms arose beside the track. Some intelligent coloured person noticed that the soil was suitable for dates, and planted more date palms. Henkries is protected from sandstorms by mountain ranges. Only a few figs grew there in the past. There are two thousand date palms now, and one day there may be twenty thousand.

Henkries is hot and windless, and bees and other insects do not pollinate the palms. This must be done by hand. But already the date crop helps to support several families. The men who dropped those date stones so carelessly in the war of long ago are proud of the plantation they started.

Namaqualand is the land of strange tales. On the banks of the Groen Rivier near Garies stands a huge, smooth boulder bearing an inscription, a splay-armed cross, the words G.

Hoop and the date 1721. You will search the archives in vain for details of an official expedition in that year, but it is known that unofficial parties went out after cattle at that period.

Just below the cross (so they say in Namaqualand) someone found buried treasure. It was in 1918 that the treasure-hunters arrived secretly, dug a huge pit, and left the spot without a word to anyone. The late Dr. P. W. Laidler, historian and archaeologist, investigated the affair on the spot. "The silence that enwraps the exploit suggests strongly that something of real or supposed value was found," reported Dr. Laidler. The hole made by the treasure hunters remained for a long time, and the mystery remains to this day.

Namaqualand is the land of strange tales. Mr. Kootjie de Klerk, a farmer in the Garies district, was climbing over the wall of his old stone kraal a few years ago when he happened to notice something black under one of the granite rocks close by. It was a rusty tin, and

when he pulled it out he found nearly eighty coins; twelve golden sovereigns, silver and copper bearing Queen Victoria's head.

Oom Kootjie's mind went back half a century in one jump. He was fifteen, the South African War was being fought, and British soldiers had come to the farm and taken his father away with them. His mother had hidden the whole wealth of the family that day; various sums in different places. No doubt she had lost or forgotten the tin box which her son found fifty years afterwards.

Namaqualand is the land of strange tales. I knew a doctor in O'Okiep who went blind ... slowly, year after year, so slowly that he developed new ways of doing his work in the darkness. As his sight failed he gained the queer sense that many old-fashioned doctors possessed; he could smell many a disease as he entered the sick room. His touch was magic. Sounds that never reached ordinary ears often told him all that he had to know. Year after year the blind doctor remained as one of the beloved personalities of Namaqualand.

Namaqualand is the home of strange tales, and for me the charm of Namaqualand has always been that most of those tales are true.

THE END

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